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ARGOSY

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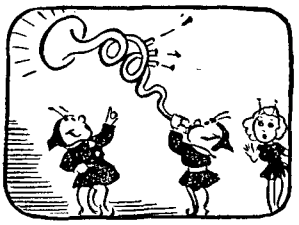

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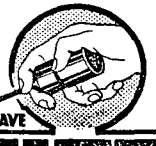

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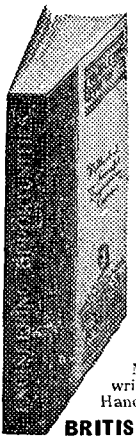

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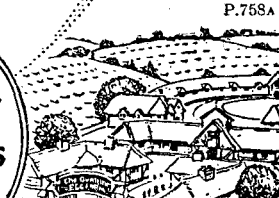

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ARGOSY

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Song of the South

APRICOTS lie
Along the arms
Of every loving shadow,
The unreluctant sky
Warms, warms
Each blade, each flower, each fruit,
Each flowering finger and foot
Upon this meadow :

The buds, the bees
Their lucid threads
Lightly go weaving, weaving ;
Under the pompous trees
Two hidden heads
Their kisses hotly now
On nape, on lip, on brow
Go giving and receiving.

And you, my golden dove,
My dear autumnal dawn
And dark December,
Now marvellously move
Your elegant, brown shape,
But ah ! remember
That our swift moments fly,
And the pacific sky
Loves with her usual smile ;
Loves : and then plunges deep
Into reluctant sleep
Her usual darlings.

FREDERIC PROKOSCH

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HERITAGE

Search as he might he had never looked upon her like

by ROSEMARY EDISFORD

THE last homing tram had sparked and clanged itself to its base. The Vicarage had trembled at the passage of the night mail to Inverness. The boiler had been stoked and closed down by the Vicar. Long since the St. Giles' carol singers had quavered themselves into the windy night; and the mice had now finished the cake crumbs scattered in the hall, and were hopefully exploring the pockets of the Vicar's Burberry which hung on the stand. They were aware that he sometimes took a sandwich with him when it was uncertain whether he could get back for lunch.

Peace should have stolen upon the house, but even the mice, accustomed though they were to the nightly uproar, humped themselves, to turn their faces, triangles of alarm, in the direction of the stairs. Great-Uncle Windibank was retiring for the night. Every morning the Vicarage shuddered with his groans as Salter, his ex-chauffeur, forced him into his clothes, and every night, when Salter put him to bed, his outcries woke the Vicar and his wife from their first sleep.

Tonight, after an unusually tiring day, Jane Cleave felt stung to complaint. "I suppose," she asked her husband wearily, "your Uncle has just never had to consider anyone but himself. I can't think how a wife endured him even for six weeks. After all, there's nothing much wrong with him."

Tom wriggled higher on his pillows and drew up his legs for warmth. Useless even to think about sleep for another twenty minutes. "As a matter of fact there was a sort of legend that he was devoted to Aunt Violet. She was a dreadful woman. When she died he locked himself in the gun-room and everyone tiptoed about waiting for the report."

"Which never came?"

"Evidently not. All that happened was that Uncle Windibank emerged after a time and rushed straight off to Vancouver to make more money, leaving everything in the house exactly as it was, without a word of instruction to anyone."

"Just like someone in a novel?"

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"Well, yes. A novel of that period. Luckily the house was burned down shortly after, otherwise it would still be just like that."

"What happened to Uncle Windibank in Vancouver?"

"No one knows, except that he went into timber. He was ruined at the time when Aunt Violet died. Mother used to say that she ruined him repeatedly. But that was the era of Edwardian prosperity, so it was easy for a man like Uncle Windibank to make more fortunes. Aunt Violet's extravagances were racing, poker and clothes. They had a colossal establishment. I believe the house would never have been burned, but it was so large that the firemen couldn't decide which bit to save first, and the roof fell in before they could make up their minds."

A final roar told them that Salter had heaved his master into bed. Jane lay silent, contrasting Aunt Violet's lot with her own. Electric riveters clanged in the docks, and the dismal voices of cargo ships mourned across the wilderness of slate roofs. To this melancholy accompaniment she thought of the huge vicarage with its mounting burden of dilapidations, of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners who refused to countenance the expenditure necessary to make it habitable for a poor man with a small family.

She thought how long these Northern winters were, how fleeting and soot-smudged the summers, how shockingly inadequate was Mrs. Dark, the charwoman. All the same, they had the children, and life had been good enough until Uncle Windibank had planted himself upon them six years before.

For some obscure reason he had always kept in vague touch with his wife's family, and when his club was damaged by a V2 he wrote to Tom and demanded temporary sanctuary. He was, he said, a ruined man, but he could manage to scrape together eight guineas a week for himself and Salter. He was unable to get into a nursing home, and his health made hotel life undesirable.

Touched by his plight and badly in need of money, the Cleaves welcomed Uncle Windibank with gentle enthusiasm. After the first week they reminded each other that this was only a temporary arrangement; at the end of the second it was painfully clear that he intended to lay his bones among them.

He had come with the firm intention of making the briefest possible sojourn convenient to him in this ghastly vicarage which, though cheerless, was blessedly out of reach of long-range weapons. But the horrors of wartime travel, and the formidable charges of the hydros which sent him their prospectuses, terrified him out of his wits. Unnerved, he settled like a derelict lorry in a ditch. The only consolation which the Cleaves could derive lay in the faint possibility that he might leave them some money with which to educate their children. Uncle Windibank took great pleasure in

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thwarting these mercenary calculations, for so he considered them, by leaving his money elsewhere. He made a will in favour of a charitable institution.

If only, the Cleaves thought, he had not despised them so much, or, despising them, had troubled to conceal it. Tom's success in a difficult parish seemed to Uncle Windibank more to be deplored than failure at some occupation such as stockbroking or usury. He despised their pleasure in meagre triumphs wrung from the acid soil of the neglected garden, their hard-worked family jokes, the old spaniel only less dear to them than their children. He despised all forms of poverty, and the Cleaves smelt of it.

If they had ever cherished a hope that the children would soften Uncle Windibank, it died early. He loathed manly little boys, and his aversion to Prue amounted to mania. With the perversity of a cat she contrived to be continually within sight or earshot. No sooner would Salter establish him in the garden, shielded from wind and excessive sun, than Prue would appear.

Pushing her rickety doll's perambulator along the moss-grown paths she would inevitably elect to make her horrid tinker's encampment a short distance away from her great-uncle. Even Uncle Windibank was at a loss wholly to account for the passion of irritation which she aroused in him. Although not an imaginative man he sometimes felt that his dealings with Prue had the quality of an encounter with some forgotten enemy, the baffling absence of any precise grievance, the painful echo of unresolved conflict.

In vain to stamp and roar and wave his stick. Prue would give him a long, malign stare, intensified by steel-rimmed spectacles, and unload her cargo of soiled plush animals. She would occupy herself endlessly with these. Dressing them up in grubby chiffon scarves and bits of cretonne she would enact dramas which, though possibly rich in significance to a psychologist, suggested to Uncle Windibank only the madhouse gibberings of a disordered mind.

In the house she was equally ubiquitous. Her shrill, aggrieved voice rang perpetually in his ears, her screaming tempers shook him from afar. It must be faced that she was a completely horrid child.

Jane, far less of a fool than Uncle Windibank thought her, diagnosed the trouble correctly. Prue had been unfortunate in getting herself born into the wrong family. Reared in luxurious circumstances her powerful personality might have bloomed in every direction; as it was it withered, soured, unco-operative and unconstructive, a blighted crab-apple in a perpetual East wind.

She felt the cold more than the others, and her nose, at once lumpy and sharply beaked, was often red. The boys were too clever. They had, impatiently, to play down to her and consequently preferred to play with each other. Their outgrown vests tickled her

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sensitive skin and outraged her sense of propriety by buttoning from right to left. She suffered from acidosis and no one knew if this were the result of her temperament or its cause. Only her canary or the spaniel could have said with any conviction that Prue had a softer side to her nature.

Though few children could have been plainer, it seemed to Jane that Prue, once she had grown up to her pronounced features and could dispense with her spectacles, might one day be more than passably good-looking. Behind the spectacles were almond-shaped eyes, as blue as those of a Siamese cat, and under a good deal of childish fat a most lovely line from ear to chin. If only she had looked more agreeable. Jane's last thought before sleep claimed her was that an enlightened but sensible school on the South Coast was essential for Prue, and utterly and for ever beyond their reach.

Across the landing the boys lay like a nest of young field-mice, breathing deeply and innocently. In the old night-nursery their sister lay twitching and muttering. Her conscious mind firmly directed her dreams which were, in consequence, about her party dress which had somehow become involved in a wild muddle with the carols she had heard that evening.

She saw three ships come sailing by where the holly and the ivy grew in every wood. The foremost flew her new dress at the mast-head. Under their keels the holly and the ivy foamed up and parted in curling wings.

A terrible enchantment filled the black arch of the starless sky. A bell swung, and at its solemn note the walls of the parish church turned to dead leaves and fell away. Nothing was left but the candles in the chancel and the voices of the choir mounting into the night. Perched on the altar cross the canary sang more clearly than the choir. He spread his wings and hovered above the spiring candles . . . this could not be endured. Prue sat up with a piercing wail. Basin in hand Jane padded into the nursery, just five seconds too late.

The mice, who were now doing the kitchen premises very thoroughly, looked at each other in sudden alarm. Insulating tape had worn off a power-cable behind the kitchen stove. As a result of the short-circuit the wainscoting was charred and still warm to an enquiring nose. Race memories of disaster prompted them to summon their families and scurry into the wall behind the wash-house. There might be no immediate danger, but there was no harm in taking precautions. The next day, when the stove had been switched on for an hour or so, they had no doubt at all that the Vicarage would go up in flames.

Because of her bilious attack Prue was kept in bed the next

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morning. She lay flat on her back telling herself a story about herself going to a party in her new frock. Her godmother had made it for her and it had fourteen buttons up the back. Not just stitched-on buttons but real ones with beautifully-stitched buttonholes.

On the way to the party she met her old self wearing the old velveteen frock which had only hooks and eyes to shut it up. She walked haughtily past this disreputable being with her rose-coloured organdie fluffing about her knees, taking small proud steps in her satin dancing-sandals. But as she reached the red-carpeted steps she stopped and told a powdered footman to undo the fourteen buttons. Pulling the frock over her head she handed it to her old self: "There you are, little beggar girl," she said kindly, "now you can go to the party instead of me."

It was a nice story and capable of variations. She was starting it again when the funny smell which had been growing stronger for some time became so funny that it made her cough. She called out, but only a feather of ash floated in through the half-open door.

The house was, in fact, empty of everyone but herself and Uncle Windibank. The Vicar and his wife had gone out some time before. Salter had slipped out to buy a last-minute card for an aunt, and Mrs. Dark, remembering that she had left the gas turned up under the pudding, had dashed round to her home.

Uncle Windibank, snoozing before the fire, was also telling himself a story. The *Financial Times* had fallen just out of his reach and after a few ineffectual pokes with his stick he gave it up and, closing his eyes, availed himself of the past. All his memories were now bound up in his wife, although not even a photograph could recall her face. In the shock of bereavement, angered at her faithlessness in dying first, so inconsiderately early, he had tried to forget her and succeeded all too well. Now it was in vain to search the undistinguished features of her nephew for any clue. But even if Tom had been a masculine version of Violet, where, in this age of timid mediocrities, could one meet with such a spirit?

He recalled with passionate pride the occasion when they set off for Ascot in their new Panhard. At a bend in the drive the chauffeur, recently a coachman, had miscalculated and overturned the car. Violet, all flying scarves, beaded shoes and tussore dust-coat, had been flung into the rhododendrons. He himself had broken a rib.

A lesser woman would have confessed to shock, a normal one would have shown solicitude, even anxiety. Violet, pursuing her usual course of almost unique insensibility and hardihood, reacted as he could have wished. Picking herself up she ascertained that her husband was in no immediate danger of death and snapped curt orders for his disposal. Hurrying back to the house she changed into the clothes which she had intended for Goodwood and set forth

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in the station fly. She arrived at the meeting in comfortable time to lose a round sum on the third race.

There were no women like that nowadays, Uncle Windibank reflected sadly. He had been unusually fortunate in his marriage. The qualities which other men esteemed in women did not appeal to him in the least. All he asked was to be ruined, cuckolded, brow-beaten and trampled on by little feet in bronze kid shoes with Louis heels. These requirements Violet had fulfilled to the letter. Search as he might in the years which followed her death, he had never looked upon her like. He puffed out his cheeks in a sigh which was almost a groan.

At this moment the door opened hesitantly and Prue made a sidling entrance. Struck with a most unusual shyness she stood rubbing one leg behind the other and gasping with the wordless intensity of a fish.

"What d'you want?" Uncle Windibank demanded, outraged by this intrusion.

Prue sucked at the loose tooth which, waggling in her upper jaw, had impeded her diction for some days. "I want my canary. The klitchen ish on fire, and theresh nobody in the hloush." To bear out this statement a fuming cloud billowed about her into the room.

The old man's purple face turned a yellow grey, more through the operation of rage than fear. It was exactly what he could have expected that Tom's fool of a wife would burn her house down on Christmas Eve. He pealed the little brass bell so vehemently that the clapper broke off and sprang across the room. There was no reply.

Prue hitched her ragged dressing-gown. "The hallsh absholutely full of shlmoke," she remarked impersonally. Pulling out a chair she scrambled on to the writing-table and lifted the canary cage from its hook by the window. If Uncle Windibank wished to save himself he might do so; he was no affair of hers.

Rage and terror nerved the old man to action. With a convulsive heave he flung himself out of his chair, his weight distributed between his stick and Prue's bony shoulder. "Help me out." Together they staggered through the doorway.

If Prue could have shaken him off she would have done so, but he held her with the single-minded tenacity of an octopus. Their progress across the hall reminded her, even in this extreme emergency, of the illustration of little Lord Fauntleroy supporting the gouty Earl. She promised herself that when she had more leisure she would make this into a story for herself.

There was not much time to spare. The hall was full of cough-inducing smoke which thickened as they went. Whooping and wheezing they tottered through the front door into the blessed freshness of an icy, sleet-laden wind. "The coach-house," Uncle

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Windibank grunted, " must get out of this . . . catch me death, 'pon m'soul. What's the matter ? Get on, gel."

Prue had stopped and was struggling madly to free herself. " My dresh, my party dresh. It's in the nursery."

" Never mind the dress ! I'll buy you a better one." Uncle Windibank's grip tightened agonizingly.

Prue continued to wail. " Let me go, let me go, let me go. I *will* go ! You old Beasht ! "

A wheedling note, unused in the last thirty years, crept into Uncle Windibank's voice. Command turned to entreaty. " You don't want poor old Uncle to *catch his death* ? No, no, no. Shocking thing . . . never do . . . Kind little gel like you. Plucky little gel, too."

Wasting no more words Prue swung the bird-cage and, to the great discomfiture of its occupant, struck it across Uncle Windibank's shins. He rocked, and taking advantage of his loss of balance, she pushed him down on the wet drive. Placing the cage beside him, with a murmured apology to the canary, Prudence turned and fled back into the doomed vicarage. On all fours Uncle Windibank gazed after her, speechless, oblivious to the scourging of the elements. As far as it is possible for a face to express admiration, when for years it has expressed nothing but anger and contempt, Uncle Windibank's face glowed with family pride. So, and not otherwise, would his Violet have acted. He felt no particular anxiety for Prue. In his experience that sort could always look after itself.

Looking upon the blackened ruins of her home the next day Jane felt like a hostess after a party. How could this mess and desolation ever be cleared up ? But already the process had begun. The children were spending a luxurious Christmas as the guests of a local shipbuilder. Jane and Tom were accommodated by one of the churchwardens in a haven of stuffy comfort. Uncle Windibank, little the worse for his experience, was in bed in the best room of an old-fashioned Commercial and Family hotel.

For him, this, Jane's last and worst failure in housewifery, had been final. As soon as it could be arranged he was to transfer himself to a hydropathic establishment at Bath. This reminded her that she must visit him and arrange about his salvaged belongings. Almost everything they valued had been saved, and now it was apparent that the Ecclesiastical Commissioners must either remodel the old building or permit them to build a new Vicarage.

She found the old man sitting up in bed and writing a cheque for thirty two guineas in lieu of notice. With all his failings he was, financially, a just man. He handed her the cheque and waved away her not too urgent protests. Fumbling on the table beside his bed he produced a little velvet box. It was old and rubbed and bore the

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loathsome marks of moth chrysalis. "There's a present for Prudence, open it."

Jane pressed the catch and the lid sprang up to reveal a ring which might have been designed for some female Titan. The enormous gold circle, tortured into the semblance of a serpent biting its tail from pure nervousness, carried three unnaturally large diamonds whose fires stabbed and retracted like lighthouse beams. Struck dumb by the awfulness, magnificence and complete unsuitability of the gift, Jane sat gaping at it in silence.

"Well?" Uncle Windibank demanded.

"I don't—I simply don't know what to say; how to thank you," Jane faltered. Groping in the confusion of her mind she laid hold upon a phrase much used by retiring chairwomen, presidents and honorary secretaries on occasions of presentation: "I shall always —I mean, I am sure Prue will always treasure it—"

For a moment it almost seemed as if Uncle Windibank were about to snatch it from her. Then he flung himself back on his pillows and the brass acorns on the bed-rails joined tremulously in his wordless prayer for self-control. He opened his eyes and stabbed an arthritic forefinger at the ring: "*Treasure* it. D'ye know what those stones are worth? No, I daresay you don't. Sell it! Get it properly valued and sell it. Spend the money on the gel. Get her some decent clothes, send her to a first-class school where they won't try to turn her into a good woman—that's not the sort of thing for her at all."

For a few minutes after Jane had gone the old man lay muttering to himself. Extraordinary thing that he could have forgotten Violet's hawk-like face so completely, that he could have failed to recognize its repetition in the fledgeling; that rapacious, high-bridged nose, those falcon eyebrows, so surely indicative of a shocking temper. Well, he remembered it now. His years at the Vicarage had not been entirely devoured by the locust. It crossed his mind that he might still alter his will in favour of the Cleaves, but he dismissed the idea. In ridding them of Prudence for three-quarters of the next few years, he felt that he had rewarded them far beyond their deserts.

* * *

SINGLE MINDED

I have often wished I had time to cultivate modesty . . .
But I am too busy thinking about myself.

EDITH SITWELL

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KARMESIN AND THE TAILOR'S DUMMY

A fair and gentlemanly division — Yes?

by GERALD KERSH

KARMESIN nudged me, and said, "Look at this."

I looked. A young man was walking towards us—a beautiful young man, dressed like an actor in a tight grey suit, a silk tie that made my mouth water, a hat that must have cost three guineas, and a magnificent pair of crocodile-skin shoes. As he passed, I caught a whiff of violet-scented brilliantine.

"*Ekh!*" said Karmesin. "Barbarians! Is there any animal more absurd than man? No. Observe me that youth. *Pfui!* He encases himself in the wool of a sheep; knots about his neck the guts of a worm; has a reptile flayed to cover his feet; skins a rabbit to put on his head; and smears his hair with the fat of dead bullocks impregnated with the juices of squashed plants. Can you imagine an ape being so stupid as to want to cover itself in the skin of a debutante, and wear round its neck a string of beads composed of the teeth of a politician? Only among men is it considered a symbol of virtue, to hang oneself with such dead animal matter—silks, feathers, bits of stone!—*Tcha!* Yet for these things, nearly all crimes are committed. Only man is vain."

I could not refrain from saying: "All the same, I watched you trying to take the shine off the seat of your trousers by scraping it with a razor-blade, the other day; and you raised blue murder when you cut the cloth."

Karmesin gave me a frightful look, and said: "You'd better be careful! Nature has placed an enemy in your mouth, to steal your brains away. If I attach some importance to dress, it is because I know that the world is full of fools who worship it. I use clothes; I am not their slave. Yet the desire for clothes, when it gets hold of a man, may be as destructive as drunkenness, drugs, or the woman-fever.

"I knew a man who used to starve himself in order to buy expensive neckties. Having bought one, he would put it on, and then stand in an elegant attitude outside the *Café Anglais*, ostentatiously picking his teeth. Indeed, one of my very earliest essays in crime was inspired by the clothes-fever of a bank clerk."

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"Were you very young then?"

"No, not very young. If I were writing a textbook of crime, a *Guide to Easy Money*, I should say, first of all: *If you wish to become a successful criminal, never start too young. Lay your plans. See much of life and men. Observe human behaviour. Work alone. Choose, first of all, a foolproof scheme; then start, coolly and cautiously, as one starts any other commercial enterprise.* Of course, I was an exception. I am a creative genius. First I conceive a crime story, then make it come true. Besides, I started with one great advantage: I was a lawyer."

"Were you?"

"Yes, fully qualified, and even with something of a practice. If I were running a training school for criminals, I should article all my pupils to solicitors. Nobody has less respect for the law than a solicitor. He has uncovered its nakedness: he has peeped under the sombre robes and observed the corsets, trusses, superfluities, hollownesses, and blemishes on the body of Justice. I was practising in Paris, and doing tolerably well. I was, as you may imagine, a very shrewd young man: clear-sighted, clear-headed, full of commonsense, subtle, quick to seize opportunities—a perfect young attorney.

"I was, also, extraordinarily well dressed. Clothes never made any impression upon me, but I knew their effect upon the world in general. So then, as always, I spent a great deal on dress. I got my coats in London: the great Fisher made my waistcoats, which were the envy of all Paris. Schall, who was a greater hatter than Gibus, made hats for me; and old Mathurin created for me cravats which caused men to say: 'They are not cravats; they are poems!'

"My moustache, moreover, was superlative; you see, now, only the ghost of what it used to be"—Karmesin stroked the thirteen-odd inches of tobacco-stained hair on his upper lip—"a moustache such as one turned in the street to admire. I used to perfume it with *Fougère Royal*. Aha! what a man I was then. The brain of a genius animating the body of a Hercules, turned out like D'Orsay! Needless to say, the upkeep of such a body was an expensive business."

"But you say you had a good practice."

"Ye-es, yes, but not as good as all that. I never could live on a small scale. It was an expensive business, I say. Besides, dressing as I did, could I live on a top floor in Montmartre? Ask yourself. No. I had a flat in the Avenue Victor Hugo. To cut it short, I found myself somewhat in debt . . .

"Well. It was my habit to eat at *Hammerschlager's*, which was

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a fashionable café. It was a species of *Quaglino's :* one ate, and then listened to a kind of band—a gipsy orchestra composed of five Montparnasse tziganes. I went there every night. I was an honoured guest. The *maître d'hôtel* called me by name, which is an honour. I always occupied the same corner table, from which point I studied humanity and watched the *beau-monde* absorbing food and wine. And I noticed one peculiar thing : at about nine o'clock every evening, when the café was at its busiest, a young man would come in.

" He was a tall, slender fellow, fairly well made, sallow skinned and dark haired, with a long, silky moustache and large black eyes. He was dressed with extraordinary care, in a good frock-coat and trousers, and a grey waistcoat with little red spots, like the back of a plaice. His hair was curled. He carried a thin ebony cane with an ivory knob. You could see that this youth spent many hours before his mirror ; touching his face, playing with his moustache, brushing his eyebrows, and even rehearsing the expression of dignity and reserve which pulled down his eyelids and tightened his rather well-cut lips. He came into *Hammerschlager's* every night at nine ; walked into the middle of the restaurant, looked into every face, turned, and slowly walked out again.

" I began to wonder why he did this. Was he looking for somebody ? No ; I was convinced that he was not. He always looked at everybody ; but without scrutiny. It occurred to me that he looked at people in order to see whether they were looking at him. He was, then, simply one of those foolish young men who dress and walk about the city in order to be seen.

" I spoke to the waiter : ' Adolphe, does that young man ever dine here ? ' ' Very rarely, monsieur.' ' How rarely ? ' ' Well, perhaps once a month—yes, about the end of every month.' ' And what does he eat ? ' ' Oh, very little, monsieur ; a sole, an omelette, with half a bottle of wine, perhaps ; never more than that.'

" Then I realized that this young man was one of those pitiable, impoverished dandies who leave the office at six, dine at a cookshop for ten sous, dress, curl up their moustaches, and then walk up and down the boulevards, and in and out of fashionable cafés. I once knew a man who did the same thing merely to display his whiskers, which were exactly like those of the Emperor Franz-Josef.

" I waited. One night, the young man passed close to me. His glance fell on my waistcoat ; his eyes lit up. Just as he was passing, I touched his sleeve. ' Excuse me,' I said, ' but aren't you Monsieur le Baron de la Tour d'Azyr ? ' He blushed with delight, and replied : ' No, monsieur ; I am M. Frederic de

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Cassis.' 'Oh, a million apologies,' I said; and so we got into conversation . . ."

"Well?"

"Well," said Karmesin, "he was a bank clerk. He was eaten up with the desire for the life of a gentleman—clothes, tiepins, and some credit in a decent restaurant or two. He wanted to cut a dash, walk the boulevards, smoke good cigars, and strut like a peacock. This was his ideal. This was his ambition and his great yearning. He craved new clothes as a drunkard craves absinth. He plunged into his one good suit with the ecstatic joy of a man dying of thirst plunging into water. He came of a good, but impoverished family. To dress was, for him, more important than to eat.

"I drew him out. His little soft soul emerged from its shell like a winkle on the end of a pin. He calculated that, with the equivalent of a thousand pounds or so, he could leave the country and join some of his more elegant relations in America. He wanted to steal some money from the bank in which he worked, but he was afraid. He feared pursuit, disgrace, degradation; the soul-destroying barrage of cross-examination, the horror of a prison sentence, the perpetual stigma of the criminal, and—worst of all—the ultimate short haircut, big boots, and ill-fitting prison clothes.

"I laughed.

"Here, I thought, I sit in *Hammerschlager's* Restaurant quietly eating an *entrecôte*, and Fate deals me a handful of aces! I said to him: 'My friend, you have the good fortune to be speaking to Karmesin, the greatest criminal attorney in Paris. You shall steal your thousand pounds from the bank. You shall go to America with it. You shall never be prosecuted.'

"'But how is that possible?' he asked.

"'My friend,' I said, 'come with me.' I took him to my flat, and dazzled him with its magnificence. I showed him my bedroom. I opened my wardrobe, and displayed seventeen coats, thirty two pairs of trousers, and forty waistcoats; cravats of every shape, size and colour; and enough linen to stock a shop. 'Have you faith in me?' I asked.

"'Infinite faith!' he replied, fondling a black silk waistcoat as a devout man might fondle a rosary.

"'Then come to me tomorrow,' I said.

"He came to see me on the following evening at seven o'clock. I showed him an envelope. It contained a ticket to America. Then I said to him: 'Go back to your bank. Steal eighty to a hundred thousand francs. Bring them here to me. Then you shall have twenty thousand, and your passage to America, and I guarantee

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that there will never be any prosecution.'

"'But how can you guarantee that?' he asked.

"I replied: 'You shall see. I guarantee it. That is enough. Do as I say, and you are safe.'

"I talked to him. He needed little persuasion—particularly when I suggested to him certain details of my little plan of campaign.

"Two days later, he slunk into my flat at six in the evening, with a fat bundle of notes: eighty thousand francs.

"'Your ship sails tomorrow,' I said to him. 'Here is twenty thousand francs and the ticket. Go.'

"He began to tremble. 'They will telegraph New York and arrest me when I land!'

"I said: 'They will not.' This, you understand, was some years before wireless telegraphy was first used by the police.

"He left, half dead with terror, and that was the last I saw of him.

"Then it was necessary for me to move quickly, because I had my side of the bargain to keep. I went to see young de Cassis' family: a shabby-genteel stepfather, and a brutal looking old lady who was his mother.

"'Frederic is in trouble,' I said. 'Who cares?' said Madame de Cassis. 'I can get him out of trouble,' I said. 'All the better,' said she, 'but don't ask me to put my hand in my pocket, because I shan't.' 'No, my dear lady,' I said, 'simply permit me to act on your behalf and his. It will not cost you a penny.' 'Well, in that case,' she said, 'proceed.' 'Very good,' I said, and went and saw the President of the bank.

"'Monsieur,' I said, 'I have been approached by the family of M. Frederic de Cassis. He has committed an indiscretion . . . He has robbed your bank of about eighty thousand francs.'

"The old gentleman jumped as if I had stuck a pin into his calf. 'What? What? Robbed the bank? Me? Us? Of eighty thousand? Eighty? Eh? Eh? *Mon Dieu!*'

"I calmed him. I spoke reasonably to him. Why pursue this absurd young man with his vengeance. He was already probably in New York, or even further. Who knew? Who would benefit, since he had almost certainly gambled the money away and then fled? . . .

"'But eighty thousand francs?' he said.

"I said to him: 'Monsieur. The family of de Cassis are of noble Norman stock. They are very, very poor; but their honour is as dear to them as life itself. I am empowered to act for them. They cannot repay the full eighty thousand francs. If they could they would, but . . . they have raised every farthing they have in

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the world. Altogether, they have raised exactly twenty thousand francs, which they will be glad to pay back to the bank in full settlement. Take it! It is, at least, twenty five centimes in the franc: better than a loss of a hundred per cent. Take it, and drop all ideas of prosecuting this misguided de Cassis! Or leave it, and lose everything.'

"He argued for three quarters of an hour on matters of ethics and principle. But I am a man of personality, force, and charm. I could have handled three such matters before breakfast. He took the twenty thousand in full settlement of the deficit. Hence, young de Cassis had twenty thousand francs and his freedom, and the bank had twenty thousand francs, and I had forty thousand. It was a fair and gentlemanly division, *chort vozmi*, and everybody was happy."

Karmesin laughed again.

"It sounds very risky to me," said I.

Karmesin nodded. "A little. But what would you have? At the very worst, they could only have refused to accept twenty thousand. In that case I should have given them forty thousand, and had only twenty for myself. But I knew the President, and my reputation was formidable. I had confidence. I knew I should never fail."

"And what happened to Cassis?"

"I lost touch with him. I said to myself: 'Here is a fool; his clothes wore him—he did not wear his clothes!' Then, about thirty years later I saw his photograph in an American magazine. Under the picture was a success story: he came to America quite penniless and in rags, and worked his way to the Presidency of a National Bank. He was wearing an ill-fitting black jacket, and striped trousers of atrocious cut."

"And what did you do with your part of the money?"

"Oh, I forget. I think I paid my tailor, and replenished my wardrobe," said Karmesin.

Another story of the amazing Karmesin next month

KARMESIN AND THE BIG FROST

by Gerald Kersh

in your AUGUST ARGOSY

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HIGH DIVER

Down there, more than a hundred feet below him, waited the little canvas tank

by JOHN ASHWORTH

ON most nights, people would stroll up and down the path and spend money at the stalls until the last and only free event of the carnival. At midnight Daredevil Rinaldi would climb the one hundred and ten foot steel ladder; pause to catch his breath and pray, "Holy Mary, have pity on me," and take a forward somersault into a tank of water four feet deep. Then everyone would go home.

On this night the crowd was impatient. Ten minutes after twelve and no Daredevil Rinaldi!

"Come on in. The water's fine," yelled a rasping voice.

Somebody guffawed, and somebody whooped.

A baby squawled. Giggling, the mother threw a pink twist of cotton candy into the water.

Then the band played *The Missouri Waltz*, softly and mysteriously. In stately rhythm the Great Rinaldi climbed to a tiny platform in front of the musicians. There he waited to be introduced, arms folded, head high and stern. He was a thick muscular man in pale orange tights and purple satin trunks and helmet. His red-brown face, with its fleshy nose and ridges of hard muscle over cheeks and chin and into his neck, looked like hammered copper.

In the quiet after the waltz, crickets chirped. A couple of men took off their hats.

"Deacon" McCallister, owner of the carnival, stood on a step-ladder behind the tank and addressed the crowd. He wore a black tight-fitting suit in which his tall bony frame made unexpected humps. His cadaverous face was framed by concentric U-shaped folds of skin round his jaw, as though he had been modelled with long squeezed-out rolls of Plasticine. "Ladies and gentlemen. You are about to witness the climax of the McCallister Carnival . . . This handsome figure of a man before you will climb the one hundred and ten foot ladder . . . He will plunge down in his world-famous, death-defying forward somersault . . . We are asking for absolute silence . . ."

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Listening, people stared at the Daredevil and waited. Just as the Deacon, his arm grandly extended, proclaimed, " I give you Daredevil Rinaldi," the crowd gasped. The star performer's coppery face had softened, and his full lips slobbered. Crumpling to the floor of the platform, he began to snore. He was very drunk.

After the Daredevil was helped to his trailer; after the Deacon apologized to the jeering crowd; after the tank was well lined and sprinkled with pop bottles, ice-cream tubs, gum wrappers, and the little cellophane bags that were filled with peanuts—Stanley Nalawack wandered around the trailer camp of the carnival and asked a workman, " Hey, Bud, where can I find Mr. McCallister ? "

Stanley was a stocky youth with short thick arms and legs, and wore a ragged football jersey, baggy trousers, and plimsolls. His body had the toughness of crude rubber. In fact, his nickname was " Chunk."

He had a wide pale face, low forehead, snub nose, and straight yellow-brown hair. His thin lips didn't change in angle when he smiled, but opened mechanically, precisely—and showed small teeth like a child's first set. His grey eyes were searching, worried, lonely; and a deep hen's track of creases always appeared between them as he said his favourite words: " Oh, for pity's sake, listen to me, will you ? "

The door of the Deacon's trailer was open to the Indian-summer night. Hesitating, Stan stood in the shaft of light and peered inside. Seated under an imitation ship's lantern at a drop-leaf table, the Deacon was sorting coins. A grey-haired woman leaned against some needlework cushions on the lower bunk and knitted.

Stan knocked.

The Deacon rose and strode to the door, his long body and limbs weaving around the jutting corners of built-in furniture and cupboards.

" Do you want a diver ? " Stan's voice was loud and forced.

" Who're you ? "

" Stanley Nalawack. I live here. I can dive."

The Deacon drew him into the trailer. " This is Mrs. McCallister. Sit down." He thumped down a seat on hinges against the wall.

Mrs. McCallister kept her hard, birdlike eyes on Stan as she commented to the Deacon, " Just an ordinary stiff."

" Now, Mary," said the owner of the carnival, fingering the folds of his chin. " Tell me about yourself, Stanley."

" I know how to dive. I've took somersaults off the rocks up in the quarry. I wouldn't be scared to go off the ladder. Is it true you pay Daredevil Rinaldi twenty quid a dive ? "

Husband and wife looked at each other.

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" Well," said the Deacon, " that's a little exaggerated. I can't pay such a figure as that. I'm just an everyday, ordinary business-man."

" How much do you pay ? Just how much ? "

" Ten quid."

" Fifty or sixty pounds a week," said Stan, thoughtfully.

" That's a lot of money, son," said the lady. With a grin she added, " Do you suppose you could land in the tank and stay in one piece ? "

" If you want a diver, I can do it," said Stan.

" What's this quarry like ? " asked the Deacon.

" High rocks. Deep water."

" How high ? "

" The highest is forty feet."

" Forty feet is a lot different from a hundred and ten. And deep water is a lot different from a tank with four feet."

" Getting paid is a lot different from doing it for nothing."

The Deacon stood up. " Naw, I won't let you risk your neck, sonny. You ain't a professional."

" Don't be hasty, Mac," said the lady.

" But heavens," exclaimed the Deacon, looking fearfully at his wife, " we can't let the young fellow hurt himself."

Stan's forehead creased. " Listen to me, will you ? Just listen to me ! "

Mrs. McCallister knitted, her eyes on her work.

" How old are you ? " asked the carnival owner quietly.

" Twenty one," said Stan, adding a year to his life.

" Well, you ain't a minor anyway," said the Deacon. " I tell you what I'll do. I'll go up to the quarry with you first thing in the morning, if you still want the job. You can show me your act."

Mrs. McCallister smiled. " You got a good chance, young man. We'd just as soon have you if you're any good. Rinaldi ain't dependable. Every day half drunk. Gives us a bad name."

" Be here at half past seven," said the Deacon.

" Sure. Thanks," said Stan, and walked out.

" Good night, young man," called Mrs. McCallister pleasantly, her needles quiet. Then she dug the needles into her ball of wool savagely and turned to her husband.

Stan ran all the way home, nearly a mile. He felt fierce and free. That night, however, lying on the army cot in his room, he imagined that his sprawling body missed the tank and hurtled to death. He felt broken arms and ribs and legs as he struck the rim, and burning organic injuries. An old cripple, Crazy Doody, wandered round the town, a hunched-up shoulder against an ear,

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one leg jerking loosely with every step, a thick tongue droning incoherent vowels. Crazy Doody kept alive by selling newspapers. Stan saw himself thus.

Just before eight o'clock the next morning, the Deacon and Stan drove into a hard, sun-baked pasture on the rim of the quarry. Getting out of his small black car, the Deacon stood and looked into a great bowl two hundred yards wide with sheer orange granite sides from twenty to forty feet high. The bottom was filled with green-black water still as sheet metal. " Is this where you go swimming ? "

" Been here all my life," said Stan. Throwing off pants, jersey, and shoes, he stood in red trunks on the peak of the ledge. " I done a lot of dives from here. I can do a forward somersault. Or a forward one and a half. Of course I can do jack-knifes and swans. What d'you want to see ? "

" Do your front somersault. Land on your feet. You ain't going to do no front-first dives into the tank."

Stan extended his arms, balanced carefully a moment, and sprang out over the water. His legs together and straight, he bent at the hips, turned over easily and perfectly during the long drop, and cut into the water, feet first. The splash echoed from the opposite cliff.

" Well ! " said the Deacon, " maybe the young fellow can do it after all."

Stan same to the surface and spouted water. " Well ? "

" That's all right," said the Deacon coldly, concealing his enthusiasm. " Do a couple of tricks now so I can see if you got timing."

As Stan was again poised on the ledge, a whistle blew two miles away in Whitneyville. He laughed. " Eight o'clock," he remarked. " That's the mill."

Then he flung himself out into space. This dive particularly, with its appearance of suicidal abandon against the background of orange granite and metallic water, convinced the Deacon that Stan was crazy enough to dare anything. Moreover, the long gliding swoop from an apparently helpless position on his back forty feet up, like a surrender to space, seemed to show the natural diver's subtle control of his body.

" That's enough," said the owner of the carnival, as Stan climbed up from the water. " I'm for you. Now I want you to talk to Rinaldi. He might be willing to give you a hint or two if you don't let him know you're going to have the job permanently. Just let him think it's for a couple of nights, until he gets over his drinking bout."

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Stan nodded, showing his teeth.

At the Daredevil's caravan, the Deacon knocked and entered immediately, Stan after him. The place smelled of whisky and like the wet shower room of an old gymnasium. On the grimy rubber floor before the tiny paraffin stove, a coloured necktie was soaking in a puddle of maple syrup. A haggard platinum blonde, leaning her elbows on the dresser, apathetically plucked her eyebrows. Rinaldi himself sprawled in crumpled pyjamas on the tousled bedding of the lower bunk.

" How do you feel, Mr. Rinaldi ? " asked the Deacon.

The Daredevil glared. " What're you coming around here for ? " His voice was low but excited and operatic. " You bird of death. You sucker of blood . . ."

The Plasticine folds around the Deacon's jaws quivered as he smiled. " You're a card, Mr. Rinaldi."

The Daredevil rolled over and presented his beefy back.

" Just a little matter of business I want to talk over with you this morning," the Deacon suggested.

Rinaldi snorted.

" This is Stanley Nalawack," continued the Deacon. " He's going to take your place, just for a couple of nights . . ."

Abruptly Rinaldi flopped to the edge of his bunk. His great brown eyes, bloodshot and dilated between their sticky wrinkled lids, glowed at Stan. Then he punched out a blunt finger at the Deacon, who recoiled. " Murderer ! What are you doing ? He's just a boy. What do you think ? You think you make money ? You think you paper the inside of your caravan with pound notes ? You think you pull out a roll and buy the dirty little things your dirty little heart wants ? You toad ! You . . ."

" Now, now," murmured the Deacon, " we didn't come here to excite you, Mr. Rinaldi. The young fellow won't be hurt if you coach him a bit. He's done a lot of fancy diving."

" A fancy diver ? Not even an acrobat ? " Rinaldi turned to Stan savagely. " Ever been in the circus ? "

Startled, Stan shook his head.

" Madman ! " the Daredevil cried at the Deacon, then hammered out some curses in Italian and English. When he was tired, he fell back on the bunk and delivered himself of the reason the young fellow could never hope to take his place : " Circus blood ! Generations of circus blood ! Ever hear of the Flying Rinaldis ? "

Stan shrugged.

Rinaldi spread his arms in tragic sorrow. " Not even cultured ! " he shrieked. " What does he know ? What can he know ? " To Stan he muttered, " When I was less than a year old, I knew more

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about timing than I knew about walking. When I was four, I could do back bends, flip-flops, handstands, and backward and forward somersaults. I felt the little, little bit of a second that makes the difference between landing on your feet or on your head. Blood, blood . . . that's what it is—blood ! "

" I don't know anything about that," said the Deacon. " I came here to talk business."

" My mother was a Hammerworth," proclaimed Rinaldi. He sat up again and held out his cupped hand as though he would tenderly support Stan's chin. " Look, you are a nice young fellow. You've got a big chest and strong arms and plenty of muscles. Why would you want to break your neck ? "

" Listen . . ." began Stan.

Rinaldi hushed him with a grandiloquent wave of hairy forearms. " How do you know what it is like on top of a hundred and ten foot ladder ? Have you ever been up there ? No ? I will tell you. It is to be all alone up there. And all the little faces down on the ground, like little bugs waiting to be squashed. They see you die, they hope. You even hope to die yourself. You say : push just a little, push with your toes when you leave the platform. Then you go over the tank and —unh-nh. . ." Loose-jowled, Rinaldi grunted to show a body hitting the ground from a hundred and ten feet. " You say : tip a little this way ; tip a little, little that way . . ."

" Oh, for pity's sake, listen to me, will you ? " said Stan.

" I pity you," continued Rinaldi without a break. " I pity you from the bottom of my heart. Suppose you twist yourself for good. Suppose you bash your insides out on the rim of the tank." The Daredevil contorted his body and lolled out a pulpy tongue to illustrate. " Look, my poor fellow, you have a sweetheart, no ? "

" No," said Stan.

" Let the kid break his neck if he wants to," said the blonde. The men gazed at her as though a cupboard door had spoken. Rinaldi bit at a fingernail.

" This is a hell of a way to live anyway," she said to the Daredevil. " What're you trying to keep it up for ? "

Rinaldi grimaced, his lips rolling back over his teeth. " Nice feathers for my pretty bird . . ."

" To hell with all that ! " Turning to Deacon, she snarled, " Just take your fifteen pounds a dive and . . ."

" Fifteen ! He told me ten," blurted Stan.

" Ten is all I'll pay," snapped the Deacon. " Take it or leave it ! "

" Get out of here," said the blonde. " Take the kid with you."

The Deacon hesitated, then moved to avoid the cupboard doors and left.

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Frowning, Stan followed.

The Daredevil bounded from his bunk and, outside the caravan, clutched Stan's arm.

"Listen, I tell you one thing. When you are on your way down, and you have turned over so your back is down—you understand?—you want to turn your head to look. Don't. You twist and hurt yourself. You want to bend to make sure you turn over. Don't. You turn way over and land flat and bust yourself. All right. You can have the job. I'm through. Heaven help you." Shaking his head, the Great Rinaldi muttered, "Ten quid!" Then he stamped back into his caravan.

The Deacon simpered as he pulled out a huge wallet. "Here," he said, handing Stan twenty one pound notes, "here's an advance on your pay."

Stan eyed the money for a moment, then tried to appear casual as he put it into his hip pocket.

"When Rinaldi was first diving," continued the Deacon, "he did some practice jumps from about thirty feet on the ladder, just to get used to landing in the tank. Maybe you ought to try a couple this morning."

At the tank, some carnival people and idlers watched Stan, in trunks and plimsolls, climb the ladder. It consisted of ten-foot steel sections. When Stan reached the top of the third section, he turned round and looked down.

"Goodbye, cruel world," he yelled mockingly. Then he waved and stepped off.

The hard jolt of landing in the canvas bottom of the tank surprised him. But he didn't think about what the jolt would have been if he had fallen from a hundred and ten feet. A carnival girl with bright yellow hair was standing next to the tank, and Stan condescendingly splashed some water towards her.

She squealed and shook her skirt. "Goodness," she drawled, "you're certainly a crazy one!"

"How about tonight, Babe?" he said loudly, so that everyone could hear.

She giggled.

"Think it over," he remarked.

Without waiting for her reply, he mounted the ladder again. When he reached the third section, he kept going.

"Hey," yelled the Deacon, "don't go any higher. You'll sprain an ankle or something. Tonight we'll tape you up."

Stan had intended to go to forty feet. But the Deacon's warning was like a dare, which he could never resist. He continued to fifty feet. Looking down, he was a little surprised that the ground seemed so much further away. The tank was quite small.

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But without hesitation he stepped off the ladder. Although he was more ready for the jolt when he hit the canvas, his breath was squeezed out, and he felt sharp aching pains in his ankles and thighs. He stood still and gasped before he lunged to the rim and pulled himself out. His legs were numb and shaking.

" If you're going to practice from that high up, you ought to be taped," said the Deacon. " I'll tape you up tonight so you can't feel nothing, so you can't feel nothing at all."

Stan refused to think about tonight. " All right ! " he said, looking for the girl with the bright yellow hair.

She was ambling away.

" To hell with you," he muttered.

After telling him to be on hand by ten o'clock, the Deacon made off.

Stan had the day to himself. Strolling along Whitneyville's High Street, he turned into a store. He bought and put on a zipper-front brown sweater with suède trimmings, brown tweed trousers, suède shoes, and thick white woollen socks. He took a rabbit's foot from his old trousers and carefully buttoned it into the left hip pocket of his new ones. Although this good-luck charm was just a joke, he planned to take it with him up the ladder.

Finally he tossed his discarded clothes on the counter and said, " Burn 'em up."

For several hours, he loafed on street corners, consumed ice-cream sodas, and candy. A car salesman heard of his new job and gave him a ride in a shiny yellow sports car. In the middle of the afternoon, he walked to Parker's Field, a stretch of weeds and hard-packed dirt between some stunted woods and the Whitney Woollen Corporation, the gridiron of the Whitneyville Steamrollers. With an announcement that he wouldn't be able to play left half any more, he refereed a practice scrimmage. No one argued his decisions.

When the scrimmage was over, and while the players were changing into street clothes, Stan lounged on the bench. Suddenly loneliness and terror blotted out his surroundings, and he day-dreamed his own death. His body was naked and white on a black couch. Four girls, their faces obscure but fresh and dewy, laid roses on his chest. His dead heart bled from the prick of thorns. He felt soft flesh and a rush of heat that was quickly sickened by fear.

When " Chief " Roberts spoke to him, Stan stared blankly as though he had never seen his friend before.

" Going back to town, Chunk ? " repeated Chief. He was lean and willowy, with savage features carved like an Indian's. Next to Chief stood " Butts " Brown, his flabby, half-open mouth for once

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speechless. As they walked, no one mentioned the dive. They talked more quietly than usual. Butts, whose conversation was generally bawdy, uttered pure, almost reverent platitudes.

Stan felt angry and helpless. He tried to tell funny stories, but floundered. Finally, mentioning casually the advance on his salary, he took them into a restaurant-bar and treated them to pork chops and beer.

While they were eating, a loud speaker van parked outside and bellowed: "Come to the carnival . . . McCallister's Carnival will this evening present a Whitneyville young man, Stanley Nalawack, in the death-defying somersault . . ." The truck made the announcement three times and roared away.

"How d'you like that?" asked Stan, serious and aggressive.

After their meal, he remarked, "I met a girl at the carnival—did you see the Musical Revue?"

Chief hadn't. Butts had.

"You remember the girl with yellow hair? She wore pink tights."

Butts leered wisely.

"I'm getting to know her pretty well," lied Stan. "I guess the Daredevil can have any girl he wants."

"Mmm," agreed Butts soberly.

Chief smiled, embarrassed.

"Come on," said Stan. "Let's go down to the carnival."

The fair was in full swing under electric lights. They played bat-the-ball, punched a bag, shot clay ducks, and scrutinized the peep shows.

"Oh, hell, you don't need to spend all your money on us," protested Chief.

"I can get plenty more," said Stan.

He had over six pounds left and suddenly wanted to buy a present for his mother. So they walked from one stall to another and gravely considered the choices. Stan bought a pocket-knife with bottle opener, can opener, screwdriver, chisel, and wrenches for three sizes of small bolts for Chief; and a bullet-shaped fountain-pen in a genuine snakeskin case for Butts. Finally, among some red wool gorillas and Italian bedspreads, Stan spotted a Venus de Milo reflector lamp. The goddess was shapely in pink glass that glowed under a canopy of variegated green plastic and bronze. It cost two pounds and fifteen shillings.

With the lamp under one arm, Stan headed for the Deacon's quarters.

Standing before the caravan was his father. His heavy face, the mouth concealed by the bushy moustache of an old-fashioned Slav, showed no emotion.

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"What're you doing here?" asked Stan.

"I heard the loud speakers," said his father.

Stan was silent. The whole accumulation of the day's fears, hates, and wishes for a moment seemed to be spent. He felt like saying, "All right. I'll go with you."

Then his father spoke very low. "Come on home."

Stan saw that he would have to decide all over again between the old life and the new. "I got a job," he muttered.

"That ain't no job," said his father. "That's crazy. You'll break your neck."

"I done a lot of stunts, and I ain't never broke it yet," remarked Stan.

Impatient and angry-sounding, his father raised his voice. "Come on home."

"No, I got a job. I ain't going to work in the mill."

"I worked in the mill."

"All right. You came from the old country and didn't know the language. I don't have to work in the mill."

"You'll kill your mother!" shouted his father, suddenly losing all restraint.

"No, I won't," said Stan, and then, with arrogant superiority, "I'm going to buy her things she never had before." He held out the Venus de Milo reflector lamp. "Here. I bought this. Take it to Mother for me."

The unspoken words were: *I may not be able to carry it myself.* The muscles over his big cheekbones were taut, his thin lips smiling, and Stan watched his father suffer. The old man's eyes were wet, but his face was like iron. After a moment's silence he took the lamp. They looked at each other, the father beaten but impassive, the son triumphant. Then Stan waved casually at Chief and Butts, strode to the door of the McCallisters' caravan, and knocked.

The Deacon let him in.

Spread out on the bunk were white tights and scarlet trunks and helmet. "These are for you," said the owner of the carnival. "I think they'll fit. Rinaldi used to wear them, but they shrank in the laundry."

The Deacon also had yards of tape and a razor. Stan shaved his legs and body. The Deacon himself shaved his back. Then he helped Stan bind his ankles, back, and abdomen with adhesive. "I know how Rinaldi put on the tape," he chattered. "Rinaldi used to own the ladder and the tank, but I bought them last year. I knew he wouldn't last in the business." Then the Deacon gave instructions in showmanship.

As Stan dressed, he again felt an impulse to run home. But at

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that moment he glanced in the mirror over the dresser and scarcely recognized himself. The scarlet helmet adhered to the contours of his head and accented the width of his cheekbones and jaw. His grey eyes glared toughly.

The tights made his thick arms and legs seem even thicker, but at the same time graceful and supple. He saw himself briefly as a miraculous comic strip hero—soaring through the sky, diving into the depths of the ocean . . .

At five minutes before twelve, the Deacon said, " All right. It's time." He opened the door and stepped out into the dark.

The carnival was roaring hysterically. The gasoline engine of the Ferris wheel sputtered. Red, white, and blue cardboard horns honked. The crowd buzzed erratically. A number of people recognized Stan.

" Hi, Chunk."

" We're with you, boy."

The band leader was primed for the Deacon's appearance and struck up *The Missouri Waltz*.

In rhythm, Stan mounted the portable steps to the exhibition platform and stood, rigid and silent, as he had several times watched Daredevil Rinaldi stand. In the garish light of the naked bulbs strung about the tank, Stan's cheeks were ghastly white, his lips from a little distance almost invisible, and his whole face flat, impersonal.

Close to the tank, Butts muttered, " That don't look like him."

" He's scared," said Chief.

" Who wouldn't be ! "

On the edge of the crowd stood Stan's father. When a fellow worker in the mill spoke to him, he did not answer. The muscles of his face drawn and stiff, he stood quietly and waited, the pink glass Venus in his arms like a baby.

A hush spread down the midway. The wooden canopies over the fronts of the stalls, which at night served as shutters, slammed. The Ferris wheel engine sputtered out. The honk of a horn was lone and haunted. The members of the band felt the unusual tension, and *The Missouri Waltz* tootled to a breathless halt.

The Deacon's voice was nasal and aggressive. " Ladies and gentlemen ! The McCallister Carnival takes great pride in introducing for the final act of this evening's entertainment a talented local young man. In just a moment the sturdy athlete before you will climb the one-hundred-and-ten-foot ladder . . ."

As the Deacon's voice ground along, Stan was almost the only person there who was not aware of his own fear. He was too angry with the people. Risking his life to give them a thrill !

". . . his first dive, his first bout with death," shouted the

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Deacon, with a fury that covered his uncertainty. He began to stammer. Drawing his handkerchief from his pocket, he wiped the sweat from his face; and in the middle of this gesture, he glanced down at his wife near the foot of the stepladder.

Her face was composed, her eyes pitiless. "Introduce him," she mouthed.

The Deacon gestured grandly towards his protégé. "So," he barked, "I give you—Stanley Nalawack."

The crowd applauded feebly, the band swung into "Pomp and Circumstance," and Stan began to climb the ladder. A voice called, "Good luck, Chunk."

Stan scarcely knew what he was doing until he was halfway up. Then he noticed that he was climbing into the night. The glow of the carnival lights became fainter, and the lights of Whitneyville outlined the pattern of streets. The ladder quivered slightly as he climbed, the steel uprights and guy wires vibrating like a great instrument. As the sound of the music became fainter, Stan had the impression that the band was marching away from him, that all the people were marching away from him, and leaving him alone.

The top of the ladder curved over like an inverted "J" and held the platform, a foot and a half square, from which he would plunge. He stood on the platform and felt his legs tremble. Remembering a detail of the Deacon's instructions, he drew a tiny silk handkerchief from the sleeve of his tights and held it out over the water. It fluttered slowly. A fake wind test. The crowd sighed. The handkerchief drifted off into the dark.

"Take your time," the Deacon had said.

Stan had climbed the ladder and made the dive so many times in imagination that he still felt no fear. He seemed to be doing his accustomed work. Looking off over the town, he saw the spire of the local church—its tip level with his eyes—alternately flash red and fade out. He heard the bleat of cars from the High Street and from the country roads, and he smelled the moist cool acid of withering autumn leaves. With proud detachment he observed the black rectangle of the mill and its few dim lights for the watchman.

He particularly noted the stars. Because it was dark on top of the ladder, almost beyond the carnival lights, they seemed large and close, closer than the people below.

With a start of dismay, he discovered that he didn't have his rabbit's foot. Listening to the Deacon's instructions, he had forgotten to take it from the pocket of his new pants. For a moment, he thought of climbing down the ladder to get it. But that wouldn't look so good! Everybody would say he was scared.

On the ground, a hysterical angry voice shouted, "Jump!"

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A few people said, " Sh-sh . . ."

Someone said, " Shut up ! "

" Jump ! " the voice shouted again.

Stan felt like throwing himself wildly into space, and then saw that he had responded to what he thought the crowd wanted, just as Rinaldi had predicted. Or did he respond only because Rinaldi had said he would ? " Damn Rinaldi," he muttered indifferently.

The crowd was a thick crescent of pale, upturned faces around the tank. They were like bugs, unfeeling, cruel . . . Angrily he thought of the mill, the Deacon, the girl with the bright yellow hair . . . He thrust back the thought of his mother, his father, the lamp . . . Suddenly, he knew that Stanley Nalawack, long imprisoned in the tired streets of Whitneyville, would now run free—or, running beyond his strength, would die.

He crossed himself and stepped to the edge of the platform. For a moment his fears and wishes cancelled out, and he felt that he knew himself for the first time. " This is me ! " he said aloud. Holding his body straight, he fell carefully and precisely forward.

" Here he comes ! " someone yelled.

Falling, he saw the small round tank, the ladder rushing by, the stars black out *Don't turn, don't bend—" Mother ! "* the tank hurtling towards him—then he smashed into it.

Red-spangled blackness battered his breathless body, his bruised organs. High and piercing whined his brain. When he could think, he knew he was crushed against the canvas bottom of the tank. He hardly dared to move. But he pushed his heavy, aching body up into the great blaze of naked bulbs. A roar came and he saw the open mouths of the shouting crowd, distorted by the drops of water over his pupils. He waded to the rim of the tank, pulled himself up, and dropped over to the ground. His legs shuddered. But his anger came back.

" Bastards ! " he muttered.

A new howl from the people enveloped him. His knees seemed without tendons, his thighs and calves without flesh, as though the denuded bones were walking. Chief and Butts, grinning, pushed forward and clapped him on the back.

Then Stan heard his own voice, hoarse and exultant, " I could do it again ! Cripes, I could do it again ! "

* * *

YOUNG IDEAL

" The Gorgons," wrote a schoolboy, " were three sisters who had long snakes for hair, tusks for teeth and claws for nails. They looked like women, only more horrible."

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DAUGHTERS OF THE SUN

Lo, whiche sleightes and subtilitees
In wommen been!

GEOFFREY CHAUCER, *The Marchantes Tale*

Throughout the world beauty is a snare to men
How could Hsi Shih long remain in obscurity?
In the morning she was washing clothes by the river of Yüeh,
In the evening she was a palace concubine of the King of Wu . . .

WANG WEI, 699-759, *Poet of the T'ang Dynasty*

Red Locks

A certain Prince had a mistress, of whom, after many years, he began to tire, finding her exceeding faithfulness to him grow wearisome. So beginning to neglect his former passion, and having lighted on a new love of deeper complexion and more to his present taste, he made a song in praise of her beauty.

"After day," he sang, "comes night, and the moon lifts up her face; after red locks dark locks have hold of me!"

Before long his former mistress, observing that his ardour slackened, found where her felicity had flown to; and without haste took counsel with herself how to regain the lost place which her jealousy and devotion still coveted.

Presently, on his visits to his new mistress, the Prince began to recognize certain jewels adorning her person, which he had bestowed in other days on the one who had then crowned his fancy. "Whence came these?" he began enquiring, after searching vainly in his own mind for a solution.

For a while his new lady-love sought to evade his questions; but when she could no more put him off (while she needs must flaunt the trinkets as more and more of them came into her possession), she answered: "There is a certain skew-eyed and faded creature, a poor broken-down old troll, who comes and drops these on me at times. And her tale is of the strangest; but as I profit by her madness I let it go. And what she says to me is this: 'One of the many who have long wearied me with their love is now your lover; and that is well, since it leaves me free to follow my own liking. Therefore, I pray you bind him close to you and keep him from troubling me further; and every time that you receive him I, in thankfulness to be rid of him, will bring you a token of my gratitude, which I hold well earned, since then I can be in the arms of the lover I love truly.'

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"This is her story, and truly I have reaped profit out of it, for each time you visit me she brings me a fresh jewel. Why, then, should I laugh in the face of the poor thing who is happy in her folly?"

But when he had considered the matter well, the Prince left her, and with renewed appetite went back to his former mistress.

LAURENCE HOUSMAN, *Ironical Tales*

Ancient Snare

Dangerous too, as a girl might sidle up,
An Egyptian girl, with an ancient snaring spell,
Throwing a net, soft round the limbs and heart,
Captivity soft and abhorrent, a close-meshed net . . .
Holding her captive close with her bare brown arms,
Close to her little breast beneath the silk . . .

VICTORIA SACKVILLE-WEST, *The Land*

The Apprentice

However this might be, Madame de Warens conceived it necessary to guard me from the perils of youth by treating me as a man: this she immediately set about, but in the most extraordinary manner that any woman, in similar circumstances, ever devised. I all at once observed that her manner was graver, and her discourse more moral than usual . . .

After having vainly racked my brain for the reason of this change, I mentioned it to her; this she had expected and immediately proposed a walk to our garden the next day. Accordingly we went there the next morning; she had contrived that we should remain alone the whole day, which she employed in preparing me for those favours she meant to bestow; not as another woman would have done, by toying and folly; but by discourses full of sentiment and reason, rather tending to instruct than seduce . . .

No sooner had I comprehended her design (which I could not easily do) than the novelty of the idea . . . took such entire possession of me that I was no longer capable of minding what she said! I only thought of her; I heard her no longer.

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU, 1712-1778, *Confessions*

Forethought

. . . Madame de Genlis, to avoid the scandal of coquetry, always yielded easily . . .

TALLEYRAND, 1754-1838, *Memoirs*

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Is It For These?

I shall not die because of you,
O woman, though you shame the swan;
They were foolish men you killed;
Do not think me a foolish man.

Why should I leave the world behind
For the soft hand, the dreaming eye,
The scarlet mouth, the breasts of snow,
Is it for these you'd have me die?

The joyous air, the fancy free,
The slender palm, the eye of blue,
The side like foam, the virgin neck?
I shall not die because of you.

The devil take the golden hair!
The maiden thought, the voice so gay,
The rounded heel, the pillared calf
Only some foolish man would slay.

O woman, though you shame the swan,
A wise man taught me all he knew,
I know the subtleties of love,
I shall not die because of you.

FRANK O'CONNOR

Very Deare

Mrs. Elizabeth Broughton was daughter of Broughton in Herefordshire, an ancient family. Her father lived at the mannour-house at Canon-Peon. Whether she was borne there or no, I know not: but there she lost her virginitie to a poor young fellow, then I beleeve handsome, but, in 1660, a pittifull poor old weaver, clarke of the parish. He had fine curled haire, but gray. Her father at length discovered her inclinations and locked her up in the turret of the house, but she getts downe by a rope; and away she gott to London, and did sett-up for her selfe.

She was a most exquisite beautie, as finely shaped as nature could frame; and had a delicate witt. She was soon taken notice of at London, and her price was very deare . . .

JOHN AUBREY, 1626-1697, *Brief Lives*

Old Enchantment

. . . Who knows not Circe
The daughter of the Sun?

JOHN MILTON, 1608-1674, *Comus*

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★*Argosy invites its readers to a Pre-view—not a seat in the stalls, but a chair on the set—to watch with the roving eye of the camera as it builds up and records a story in celluloid.*

But our guests have an advantage over the film-goer, for here is the scenario—not the "shooting script" which the director holds, but the original story from which that script was born. This is, in fact, the picture-play reduced to words, the process of thought, the association of ideas which bring the shadow play to life.

Now the clapper boy signals the first sequence. Fade in—and the camera pans our scene—a remote village in High Sierra—and a strange and unfamiliar world, full of strangely familiar characters—Fade in—and we move into action—

UNDER THE JUNIPER TREE

by CARYL BRAHMS

EARLY one morning, before the sun had sailed itself clear of the far Sierras, a small boy crouched crying before the shrine in the sun-baked square of a timeless village in Spain.

Timeless because remote—one century being strictly like another in High Sierra.

The square looked rather as though the small boy had drawn it—the sun-baked houses with their balconies scrawled across them, the plain oblong church, the sullen gaol, the inn, the well, the nine and seventy steps that led up to the bridge that spanned the millstream; the lot of them tilted against the sky.

The shrine was erected to the Glory of God and Our Lady of Showers, by public subscription some centuries ago, to give High Sierra proprietary rights on an occasional downpour. And the boy had been told never to touch the beautiful blue-cloaked, crowned and smiling Madonna that stood behind the gilded grille of the shrine. He was sobbing because he had. And there was Our Lady of Showers in two irrevocable pieces, a catastrophe that would outrage the whole of High Sierra, when tomorrow, the first Sunday of the month, and not a cloud in sight, the villagers were due to assemble at noon and formally indent for rain.

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So the boy was beside himself with terror and remorse. Not only would he, for a variety of reasons of which this was certainly the gravest so far, burn in hell eventually, which was a long way off and so hardly counted, but also he would be thrashed to within an inch of his life, practically at once. Aie! Though less, of course, for the wrath of God than for the fury of High Sierra!

"Carlo!"

Peremptorily his name came floating down from a window in the hard dry voice of the Widow Alborado. The boy trembled and paled. It was well known that the rich old woman had one eye more than ordinary people—set in the back of her head.

What had she seen? What did she know, already?

"Carlo!" rasped the voice impatiently. The boy held his breath and closed his eyes. He wished the Widow Alborado would drop dead, like Miguel Money-bags. He wished the whole of High Sierra would do the same. Passionately the boy prayed that the world might come to an end before the village could find out.

Soon the sun had sailed into the clear and the bright hot day had begun. High Sierra came, unwillingly, to life. Lattices were thrown wide, carpets were flung out, and from the windows voices scolded, sang snatches, exchanged the gossip or the insults of the day and commented on life as it passed in the square below.

A sprawling figure collected itself into one piece and wavered over to the inn. Ignatius, the village loafer and thirsty already, rapped on the door and holla'd for wine. The landlord, the meanest man in High Sierra, including even the late Miguel Money-bags, snarled and slammed the door in the loafer's face. The loafer shrugged and pulled his hat over his eyes and twanged a phrase on his guitar, while the enwindowed ladies laughed at his discomforture.

"Work, work, you lazy wretch! Leave thirsting to your betters," rasped the Widow Alborado, just as though she did have an eye set in the back of her head.

On the balcony of the inn, Concepcion, the flashing young wife of the angry innkeeper, was holding a red rose in her white, white teeth, but it is not the thought of her husband that brings the blood up to her cheeks and makes her glance so melting. She is waiting for the gay young miller, who will come across the bridge. The neighbours hurled coarse words at her, but inwardly how envious—how envious!

Soon the roofed-in well-trough was lined with doubled-over women who had brought their linen to wash. Among them merry Marika the Corregidor's love child. How could Alonzo, the village lecher, resist stealing up and pinching merry Marika. Marika's shrill high-pitched giggle floated across the square.

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"Slap him on the face, you slut," enjoined the Widow Alborado. She must indeed have had an eye set in the back of her head. For had not the rich old woman been bedridden these fourteen droughts and three downpours? At the store a fine old haggle was in progress, where Andreas had been caught short-weighting Granny Alcazuna.

"Thief! Thief! Thief!" rasped the Widow Alborado from her bed. And as Andreas and Alcazuna looked fearfully up to the rich one's window, Innocente, the village pilferer, dumb but crafty, grabbed an aubergine from the counter and went beetling off with it, one leg dragging behind. If the Widow Alborado could have clawed that far she would have torn his tongue out.

The Widow Alborado was the richest woman in High Sierra. For a quarter of a century she had ruled the village by disinheritance. All day long she sat bolt upright in her bed, wrapped in a black shawl, issuing orders, and scolding, even when they had been carried out; her eyes were small black beads, her fingers jewelled claws, and she made her ward's life a misery.

Elvira was in love. But all that Pedro the Penniless could hope to inherit, now that the Corregidor had cheated him out of the farm his dying father had left in his charge, was the love of God, which was nothing like enough in the three eyes of the Widow Alborado, so she never gave her ward a minute's peace.

"Pauper! A pauper! That's what you will be if you marry the penniless Peon, for not a peseta of my money will you see! I shall leave it all to the holy sisters—unless of course they vex me! You shall see!"

"But Tia, we love one another," said her ward and niece.

What did anything else matter?

"Ninny," snapped the Widow Alborado.

"And Pedro has such a wonderful voice—you ought to hear him serenading," pursued Elvira, glowing.

"I do," said the Widow Alborado, grim. "And if he comes caterwauling here again, I'll pour cold water on him if I have to leave my bed to do it!"

But Elvira failed to tremble at this terrible threat.

She was looking longingly out of the window where Pedro the Penniless had joined Ignatius and his guitar at the flagonless table.

Thrum!

The last man to come reluctantly to life under the glare of the brazen sun was the man in the village gaol, the Inglés, who was going to die tomorrow for the murder of Miguel Money-bags. Outside it was a regular scorcher as usual, but the man who would die tomorrow was not concerned with the weather today. Partly because, as it so happened, the gaol was quite the coolest place in

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the whole of the village. Nor was he haunted by remorse for the killing of Miguel Money-bags. Better men than Miguel got killed by accident in hold-ups, and Miguel had been a pompous old fool, as swollen up with self-importance as his saddle had been with the money that had eased the Inglés last inglorious days.

The Inglés, gazing out and down to the only part of the square he could see through the high barred windows of the gaol, a glimpse which, ironically enough, took in the table outside the inn at which so many of his years of living in the sun on what remittance came early in the month—that very table at which so many of the pennies from—no, not Heaven, though that is what they seemed like every time—had been squandered.

From the high barred window, the Inglés could just see the shadow of a man with a guitar. That would be Ignatius, the village loafer, his friend, and José the hot head, father of little Carlo, the poor little half-starved devil of a Spanish kid and Luisita, his little love, who, for all her Spanish fire, had been too cold and proud—or too shy and afraid—to let him come to her. This the Inglés regretted far more than the fatal mishap to Miguel Money-bags; for there had been a moment when it seemed that it must be either Miguel or him. Unlucky, that as things turned out, it had to be both! But then, of course, that was death all over!

But even stronger than his regret over the fierce virginity of Luisita, was a strong sense of frustration which was hag-riding him in these, his last hours on earth, that since his death was to be untimely, he had not met it more heroically in the war he had stayed away from fighting.

The Inglés sighed and turned away from the pair of legs that had just added themselves to the shadow of the arm and the guitar. The key was grinding home in the ancient lock. It was Luisita, who came each day to keep house for the Corregidor, with a flask of red wine in her hand. The Inglés last breakfast. Just like all those other breakfasts.

Luisita turned her grave look on him. "It is sad," she said, "that the holy priest is still abroad in Málaga."

The Inglés grinned. "I shan't miss his holiness while you are here, I promise you!"

"But," persisted Luisita, "if the priest is not back by dawn tomorrow, you will burn in hell forever."

"*That* in any case," said the Inglés.

"But I am serious," said Luisita.

"Me too," said the Inglés. But he was teasing her as usual.

The tears welled up in Luisita's eyes. "Why did you have to kill Miguel Money-bags," she mourned. "Why did it have to be you who killed him?"

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The Inglés shrugged. "One of us had to," he said, "or he'd have had one of us." The girl nodded gravely.

"Sooner me than José the hothead," said the Inglés. "José has a son."

"Little Carlo," said Luisita fondly. Almost she was smiling for a minute. Then she remembered: "José wants to see you," she said.

"Well, I don't want to see him," said the Inglés shortly.

"But . . ." began Luisita.

"I tell you I'm not seeing anyone. And if you let him in, I shan't have you to sit with me in the night watch. Mind, Luisita, I mean it," he warned.

Luisita held back her tears. Time and enough for weeping them in all those sad, sad tomorrows. Some devil must have entered into the Inglés to make him hold up Miguel Money-bags, and not wish to bid his friends farewell. She picked up the empty flask.

"I will bring you more wine," she promised, "after the siesta."

Siesta-time in High Sierra. From every window came the sound of snores. Only little Carlo was awake in all the sun-baked square. His sin was heavy on him. All morning he had hung about the scene of his enormity, afraid, lest someone should open the grille to enlist the sweet intercession of Our Lady of Showers, when he would be undone indeed!

Now, although at siesta-time the village was deserted beyond the wildest dreams of the poet, it was the hour of the daily descent of the Wise One.

The Wise One lived a life of contemplation in the cave by the Juniper Tree at the foot of an even Higher Sierra. The Wise One knew all—it was well known. Besides, he could read. Indeed, drudging along in the narrow ravine between the third eye of the Widow Alborado and the uncanny foresight of the Wise One, the path of High Sierra should have been one of extreme rectitude. Nevertheless, High Sierra back-slid, as villages the world over will.

The Wise One lived his life of contemplation on whatever, of its plentitude, High Sierra put out in his food bowl, which stood at the foot of the shrine. They took it in turn to placate the Wise One, filling his bowl with delicate white fowl and good rosy rice, lest his second sight should turn into the evil eye.

Today it was the turn of Luisita.

But today, as we have seen, Luisita had a great deal else on her mind. There was this matter of her virginity.

With her love about to die tomorrow for killing Miguel Money-bags, could virginity be anything like so important as bearing the

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Inglés a son to pray for his soul in eternal torment? The Inglés who used soap for washing with; the Inglés who could make her heart flutter like an oleander leaf. But if she bore the Inglés a son, what would the Widow Alborado say? Or rather, what, indeed, would the Widow Alborado not say? Aie!

Here was a problem that not even the Wise One could hope to solve. Small wonder that, lying wide-eyed on her truckle bed, Luisita should have forgotten to fill the Wise One's food bowl.

Down in the sun-baked square, little Carlo's ears pricked for danger, and he hid behind the covered well-trough. But it was only the Wise One, come down from his hill to fetch his food bowl.

Above his bowl the Wise One went into his daily routine of delicious procrastination. First he closed his eyes. Then he snuffled thrice. Then he picked up the bowl and prodded. Then looked to see what the good High Sierra had provided . . . Aie!

Today, confronted by an empty bowl, the Wise One flew into a rage to make the rocks shake. In a frenzy of fury he rang the bell on the cord at his waist, crying woe to the waking-up village, a livid Elijah from an El Greco canvas.

Soon all High Sierra, with the exception of the rich old woman in her bed and the poor young Inglés in his cell, had assembled in various stages of anxious awareness before him.

"Woe! Woe! Woe!" intoned the Wise One.

High Sierra shivered. Clearly some terrible thing had befallen. Maybe the Widow Alborado was dead at last.

Certainly it was not the Widow; for here came her accustomed comment, floating down from the window, dry as a cactus:

"Well, what is it?" she demanded crisply. "Speak up man, and don't stand there mumbling."

The Wise One cleared his throat.

"It has been revealed to me," he announced, "by certain manifestations," he glared at his empty food bowl, "that the world is about to come to an end."

A gasp arose from the village.

"Tomorrow at dawn, the earth will stop revolving and all living things thereon will perish," proclaimed the Wise One. "Perish," he repeated petulantly.

"Aie!" mourned High Sierra from seventy throats. The end of the world had come!

"Tomorrow," the Wise One told them, "at dawn, the sun will fail to rise. Woe! Woe! Woe!" he intoned with some satisfaction.

"Aie! Aie! Aie!" agreed the village. It threw its shawls over its heads. It was the end!

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The Wise One pulled his girdle more tightly in. He turned to stalk off, and in turning caught sight of Little Carlo standing before the well. Little Carlo turned to stone; fear and remorse reflected in his countenance. For see what his wickedness had brought on High Sierra; on Spain; on the whole world!

The Wise One, majestic and very empty, stalked up the hill. High Sierra stood there helplessly, watching the gaunt frame dwindle.

Then all High Sierra lamented together. All High Sierra advised at once. High Sierra turned with sixty nine voices on the Mayor and ordered him to use his influence with Providence, but it soon transpired that this was the one direction in which there was not one near-relation of the Mayor's to be found.

High Sierra turned to the Corregidor. Was he not as twisty as a tendril? Could he not find some way in law to stop the ending of the established order? But crafty as he was, the Corregidor could not find a single clause to make the world keep turning.

Desperate, High Sierra steeled itself to disturb the Widow Alborado and called upon her to buy them out of total extinction. But money cuts no Spanish Onions in Heaven, and for once the Widow's third eye could see no way out.

The sun was going to fail to rise tomorrow, and nothing and nobody could bring on the dawn. It was written in the stars. And it would mean the end of the world!

Even Little Carlo had found his voice and was using it to make sure of something: "Before the prayer for rain?" he asked almost with hope.

"Yes, yes, poor little innocent," said High Sierra, and it wept anew, and quite failed to notice that Little Carlo was looking on the whole, relieved.

High Sierra set about preparing itself to meet the end of the world with clean, or at least with cleaner, hands.

Innocente, the village pilferer, whose wits were not blunted by the wear and tear of finding words to cloak them with, was the first to apply them to the squaring of the hereafter. Having, in the hubbub, filched, from force of habit, the handkerchief out of the apron-pocket of Concepcion, the innkeeper's suddenly less flashing young wife, now bethought himself and replaced it. But being less skilled in restoring than in extracting, she caught him at it, and was about to box his ears, when she remembered her end, and with tears in her eyes, pressed it back into his astonished hand. And he, every bit as anxious to stand well in the sight of Heaven, pressed it back again. And the whole thing looked like developing into a nasty brawl, and there could be no shade of doubt that it

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was as well that there was going to be no giving and taking of handkerchiefs in the hereafter.

As for her husband, the innkeeper, he was engaged in a curious new kind of moral barter with, of all men, the young miller. Indeed, had not High Sierra had quite so much on its conscience at that moment, it would have been agog at this fascinating haggle.

"Take her my friend, she's yours," the innkeeper was saying emphatically.

"No, no, old friend," the miller protested. "I am resigned. I have restored Concepcion to her loving husband's arms." He folded his own.

"And I," said the innkeeper, "decline to deprive you of her."

They glared at one another.

Concepcion, who had solved the problem of the handkerchief by ripping it in two pieces, was glaring too.

Meanwhile, the Corregidor had flung a fatherly arm about Pedro the Penniless and was bestowing upon him the deeds of the farm he had so cleverly tricked him out of. In fact, everyone who had anything to give away, gave it, as hastily as a suddenly developed reluctance to receive, quite different from High Sierra's normal attitude to the property of other people, permitted.

Bolt upright in her bed, the Widow Alborado was banging unbelievingly on her floor with her ebony stick, her customary method of summoning her household to her. No one had come hurrying in. No one. Gradually it dawned on the rich old woman that her reign was over. Money could do nothing for her now that poverty held no terrors for other people. She would have to fall back upon natural affection.

"Ninny," she shrilled. "Elvira! Ninny!—where are you hussy? Where are you slut? Where are you, child . . ."

But her niece was out in the sun-baked square, hand in hand with Pedro the Penniless.

Even Ignatius, the village loafer, had arrived at a stern decision and gone to work at last. There he was, scrubbing down the tables outside the inn. Luisita, hurrying past on her way to bear the tidings of the ending of the world to the Inglés who was to die tomorrow, nearly paused to take in the unaccustomed sight.

In his cell the Inglés awaited the advent of his little love with some amusement.

Here she came, as he knew she must, flying into his arms and babbling about the end of the world, bless her. He buried his face in her hair. She was trembling like a frightened child.

"Oh, Inglés," she sobbed, "Oh, Inglés, tomorrow we are to die after all together!"

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"And would that be so very terrible, my little love?" he whispered.

And he was thinking, "Perhaps tonight!" Perhaps . . .

Night had fallen in High Sierra—such a night as you never did know.

For the innkeeper had thrown open his cellars and the carousal was on the house. High Sierra, having made what terms it could with eternity, was now in a mood to enjoy its last night on earth.

Husbands and wives, for years estranged, sought one another out. Young lovers urged their mistresses to yield now, while there was still time. And there was to be a midnight wedding—or the next best thing.

For the Widow Alborado had consented to the marriage of her niece and ward, Elvira, to Pedro the Penniless. "If you are determined to starve, Ninny, at least it will be only till tomorrow," she rasped.

So though, with the priest away, Elvira and Pedro the Penniless could not be married in the church, they were to be wed by the Ceremony of the Candles—that ancient rite which High Sierra had inherited from those unenlightened centuries when it had still been nothing but a gipsy encampment.

And so, as the church clock creaked into the third quarter, the nine and seventy steps that lead down to the square became a glimmer of candle-shine, as from every house young people trooped to join the bride's procession.

And when they had gathered in the square, Elvira came down to her Pedro. She was all in white—a creamed and crackling white, for the gown had been the wedding dress of the Widow Alborado.

And there, in the presence of God and man, and well within the vision of the third eye of the Widow Alborado, bolt upright in bed, bride and groom solemnly promised to cleave to one another till their last day should come. And together they paced the solemn measure of the dance of the candles, while rustic voices chanted, and with here and there a hiccough. Until the village clock chimed twelve. And then, slowly, inexorably, the death bell tolled.

It was tolling for the village. For Spain. And for the whole world. And with its tolling the rustic voices ceased their wedding chant and sang together a threnody—it was the village death song, that they sang for the death of the village.

And when they had finished the threnody, High Sierra went its ways, some to cleave to one another. Some just to sleep. But most went back to the inn and drank themselves into a stupor.

In an olive-orchard, at the foot of the even higher Sierra, not

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a gourd's throw away from the Wise One's cave, the Inglés was lying under an oleander tree with his little love. For since he was to die tomorrow like everyone else in the world, of what avail to lock him up tonight? This was logic.

Yet he lacked the happy air of a man with his love beside him. Once again, love had failed to bring peace.

For the Inglés knew well that freedom lay ahead, yet was he impelled to stay here. Escape was not for him.

Luisita, by his side, gave a little sigh. She was coming back to a world of woe. But which woe? For the moment she'd got her sorrows mixed and it was the older one which possessed her spirit. "Why did you have to kill?" she asked. "Why you?"

So the Inglés lit a cigarette and tried to explain this thing that he could not understand himself.

"No man wants to kill another," he told her, "not if he has time to think. There are other ways . . . But maybe a man has need to kill. It can happen that way. Maybe there's a war and it's his duty to do it. And maybe he runs away and leaves other people to do his killing for him. We owe God a death," said the Inglés. "Shakespeare," he added, "and you can read it both ways."

But his little love ceased listening. She was burying her face against his shoulder. How white and tender Ingléses were—and they smelt of soap—how strange!

Came the dawn. Or very nearly. To the sound of the tolling bell High Sierra blinked itself awake. Was it in Heaven already? If so, it looked strangely like its own village. And wherever it was its head was bursting. Aie!

The bell tolled.

High Sierra came suddenly to its scattered senses. The last sleep was upon it and here it was, asleep.

As one village, it betook itself to the rise of the hill. As one it turned its face to the East, waiting for the sun that would never rise and shine again in this world. And High Sierra trembled.

The bell tolled.

Up the hill came an unlooked for sight. The Widow Alborado had left her bed. She advanced stiffly, for it was a quarter of a century since she had admitted to nether limbs. She advanced proudly, for high Spanish pride was hers by heritage. She advanced in company, for Innocente, the village pilferer, who dragged one foot behind, came whimpering with her, and together they wavered and dragged up the hill to die with all the village.

The bell tolled.

In the olive-orchard Luisita awoke. A succession of stubbed-out cigarettes proved that the Inglés had long been wakeful.

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"Hark," she said.

"Seek not to know for whom the bell tolls, for it tolls for you," he misquoted. Luisita felt for her rosary.

The bell tolled, and the village sank upon its knees.

The bell tolled again. And again!

"Now," thought High Sierra and it held its breath.

And as the bell gathered its sound the Wise One came out from his cave and stalked down the slope to the village. And as he stalked he rang the bell on the girdle at his waist.

"Attend! Attend!" he intoned. "For Providence has relented." The village attended. "Seeing how well you have mended your way of life, the world will not come to an end . . . yet."

The bell tolled again.

And even as he looked meaningly at his food bowl, the sun sailed out from behind the highest of the Sierras and touched the world to life.

Overwrought, the village turned and hugged its neighbour.

Little Carlo burst into tears. And all the time the great bell tolled.

Beside itself with joy, High Sierra ran down to the square to bring the tidings to Fernando, the bellringer.

So High Sierra, redeemed, looked at the world with new eyes. How good the blue sky looked today! How good their homes.

And that reminded them—whose turn was it to fill the Wise One's food-bowl? For with the end of the world over, or at least postponed indefinitely, the threads of life must at once be resumed.

Straightaway Elvira hastened to the Widow Alborado's larder and filled the Wise One's bowl to overflowing with good rich goose and rosy rice and to spare—Elvira, the new bride.

Aie! For by now the village had had time to look the future in the face—and it did not care at all for certain of its features.

A pretty pass their good behaviour had brought them to!

Here was the Widow Alborado, denuded of her third eye, but in full possession of her legs. Aie!

And here was her ward and niece, Elvira, indisputably the wife of Pedro the Penniless, though not as penniless as he might have been, now that he had got his farm back from the Corregidor.

And here was the Corregidor, who had rashly given away all that he had stolen from the village, about to go into a huddle with his law-books to see how he could quibble it back again.

And, cruellest of all, here was Ignatius the loafer, stranded with a job on his hands, and already someone was bawling him out for not doing it!

The innkeeper and the miller were in angry conclave.

"And I demand that you, you give me back my wife."

"And I demand that you return my mistress." They glared . . .

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The snap of a finger in their faces recalled their livid looks and focused them upon Concepcion, the flashing bone of their contention. Through with the pair of them, she was swinging her hips for the benefit of Alonzo, the village lecher.

And Little Carlo was running a temperature.

A pretty Spanish pass High Sierra had come to.

And who was the cause of it all ?

As one village they turned to run the Wise One out of town.

But, as though by divination, already he had reached the seventy ninth step and was about to dwindle over the bridge.

Triumphantly, gloriously, briskly the bell tolled on, for Fernando the bellringer was a man of habits not easily broken.

And up the nine and seventy steps, over the bridge, keeping to the shadow of the even higher Sierra, Dulcinea the Shrew betook her secret way to the Wise One's Juniper Tree. So now the day of judgment had turned out to be nothing but a misjudgment of the Wise One, the old fool. And that made it necessary to collect the Widow Alborado's mended rosary immediately.

Dulcinea had but one eye, and that evil, according to High Sierra. From force of habit Dulcinea's Evil Eye darted here and there as she crept up the slopes.

Aha ! Carmen the cow, who belonged to Pedro the Penniless—for the moment—was about to calve. Aha !

And was that the mule of the village Contrabandista tethered outside merry Marika's cottage ? Interesting, indeed !

And what was that beneath the oleander tree in the olive-orchard ? The Evil Eye of Dulcinea the Shrew crept up behind a boulder the better to inform itself.

" So," said Luisita, under the oleander, " the bell was not for us today, after all," and she laughed for the very joy of living.

Tenderly, gravely, the Inglés took her face between his hands.

" No, Luisita, the bell was not for you," he said.

Luisita's eyes went wide. " You," she said. She covered her mouth with her hand. She had completely forgotten this earlier woe.

" Me ? " The Inglés shrugged. And he laughed. But his laughter rang falsely. It cut straight to Luisita's heart.

" They couldn't kill you now," she said.

" Why not ? " said the Inglés grimly. " Miguel Money-bags is dead. Nothing changes that."

" Then you must go now. Now. At once ! " Luisita's little hand began to push him, desperately, unavailingly. The Inglés caught them and kissed them.

" No Luisita," he said. " Man owes God a death. And death is a debt I could have paid in the war if I had gone back to my

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country. Instead I stayed here; and instead I shall die here. And," said the Inglés, "that is all there is to it."

The Evil Eye of Dulcinea the Shrew saw the rightness of this.

"Go, go, at once. Go quickly," urged Luisita, "and if you will not save your own life for your own sake, save it for mine."

"No," said the Inglés, "no, my little love. I must stay."

"But why?" she demanded. "Why?"

"I will tell you why," said a man's voice behind them.

The Evil Eye of Dulcinea the Shrew jumped.

It was José the village hothead.

The Inglés took a step towards him, and made to speak.

José ignored him. "I will tell you why the Inglés will not go, little sister. It is because if he goes I must die."

"You," said Luisita. She did not seem surprised. But the boulder gave a gasp.

"I killed Miguel Money-bags," said José the hothead. "Miguel Money-bags, pfui!"

"Yes," said Luisita dully, "it was you, José, I see that."

The Evil Eye of Dulcinea the Shrew popped.

"He did it to save my life," said the Inglés. "And so it's only fair that I should save his. I shall do it by dying."

"Dying," said José the hothead with scorn. "What is it to die? Yesterday we were all going to die together. Today I die alone instead. Pfui!"

"Exactly," said the Inglés. "Only it is I who will do the technical act."

"Thief!" cried José the hothead. "So now you plot to steal my honourable death from me!"

"Have you forgotten Little Carlo?" said the Inglés. "Poor little Spanish Carlo?" Little Carlo. Brother and sister looked at one another. The boulder wriggled with delight.

"The Inglés is right, José. The one who dies must not be you," said Luisita. "For if you die there will be no one to care for Little Carlo."

"There will be you. Nothing changes that."

"No José," said Luisita, "for I shall be in hiding with the Inglés. I, too, have a life," she told them proudly.

"But I shall have none, this time tomorrow," said the Inglés, "for it was I who killed Miguel Money-bags, morally. When José sprang at the gun it was being pointed not at him but at me. Only it went off in the body of Miguel Money-bags. So you see your brother saved my life, and now—let us say for no better reason than to save Little Carlo from the scolding of the Widow Alborado, I will be the one to die."

"You are a brave man, Inglés," said José the hothead, "but

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we Spaniards die our own deaths. Pfui!"

"And Little Carlo?" asked Luisita, "shall he be left to the mercies of Dulcinea the Shrew?"

The boulder hissed.

"Shall the little innocent no longer walk before the priest at Mass?" She wept.

"Little Carlo walks in the shadow of the family honour. In Spain this is an honour," said José the hothead.

"Poppycock," said the Inglés.

"Pssst!" said Luisita.

For two figures had emerged from the Wise One's cave and had planted themselves in the shade of the Juniper Tree.

"But my friend," the priest was protesting under the Juniper Tree, "that impulsive and singularly ill-founded prophecy of yours has sent my village back into the dark ages." He tapped with his fingers on his stomach and he shook an admonishing head at the Wise One, who had surrounded himself with the village *objets d'art*, most of them in a minimum of three pieces.

"Oho!" said the Wise One, "professional jealousy, eh?" He picked up half a china pitcher that belonged to Concepcion and dabbed it with juniper sap.

"Nevertheless, you have to admit," he pointed out, "that High Sierra had mended its ways." He picked up the other half of the pitcher and set the two pieces together.

"Poof," said the Priest. He was not impressed. "As to that, I saw Innocente making off with a fine fat aubergine, as I passed through the square, which argues small improvement."

The Wise One was searching round for the appropriate handle. There now! Concepcion's pitcher was all in one piece again, and ready for narrowly missing the innkeeper all over again.

"Backslider!" growled the Wise One. "And that reminds me of a problem I have to pose."

"Pose away my friend," said the priest.

"Let us suppose," said the Wise One, speaking a little more loudly, "let us suppose that a man is about to die for his friend."

"To suppose costs no pesetas," quoted the priest.

"Let us suppose," the Wise One postulated, "that these two friends have waylaid a traveller to—um—arbitrarily borrow gold."

"Arbitrarily borrow," said the priest, "snff—snff—snff—that was well defined my friend. Beautifully defined." He closed his eyes and took a pinch of snuff.

"Let us suppose that this borrowing leads to a struggle," said the Wise One, "and in the struggle a gun goes off."

"Pointed guns have hasty habits," granted the priest.

"Let us suppose that the man who is willing to die for his

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friend, who in turn would have been dead, but for the struggle that ended in killing Mig . . . the traveller . . . has, by some miracle, been granted a chance to escape and live . . ."

"God is good," said the priest. He looked approving.

"And some of His children are not without wisdom," said the Wise One smugly. He smirked. "However," he continued, "let us suppose that this man is now free to go with the little Luisita where they can live out their lives together."

"Yes, my friend," said the priest, "let us suppose that."

"But," said the Wise One, "let us also suppose that he is not willing to seize this chance of life, our innocent man, because the friend, who killed old Money-bags in his defence, has here a little son, who would be delivered up to the uncharitable."

"Uncharitable folk in High Sierra," said the Priest. "Ttt—ttt—ttt!" he managed to sound shocked.

"My—um—my slight miscalculation over the end of the world," admitted the Wise One, "while it is a matter for general rejoicing, has left these three people with a problem that it is beyond even my powers to solve."

"Oho!" said the priest.

"The man who did not kill holds that he has a right to die his own death." The Wise One ticked off another finger.

"And the little Luisita?" asked the priest.

"She thinks of Little Carlo and she weeps."

From under the oleander, a stifled sob floated across to the Juniper Tree. The two old gentlemen wiped their own eyes.

"And who can wonder," said the Wise One, "for is she not sister to the man who killed and—um—betrothed—to the other?"

"Betrothed," said the priest, well pleased. "Well, well, it seems only the other day I was christening the little Luisita!"

"To the point," chided the Wise One. He reached for more Juniper juice. "What is the view of the Church on this three-cornered predicament?"

The priest took a pinch more snuff. Then he said, thoughtfully, "For a man to take the life of another is mortal sin. But for the man to save the life of another, this is accounted unto him for virtue . . . And since intention must rank in the golden ledger of the blessed recording angel, as high as the achievement, the act, after some temporal atonement, will be cancelled out."

"Ah!" said the Wise One. He had counted on this. "Therefore I take it that you would take your purse and fill it with the paltry pesetas that the Widow Alborado donated so hastily to the poor box yesterday . . ."

The priest held a leather money-bag aloft and smiled gently at his friend.

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" . . . and place it for—um—safety under the Juniper Tree . . ."

" For safety," said the priest, " that was well bethought."

"And you would leave it there and forget to take it with you."

" The memory of man," sighed the priest, " is full of holes."

" So that the Inglés, happening upon it, may have the means to escape and take with him the little Luisita."

" And even put a little away for a sunny day," said the Priest. " Quite, quite, quite, quite! And you, my friend," he ordered, " will take your food bowl . . ."

" Wazzat ? " said the Wise One.

" Filled to overflowing with rosy rice and good rich goose . . ."

" Blessed if I will," said the Wise One, showing fight.

" And you will place it," said the priest quite unperturbed, " beside my money-bag, and you will lose your appetite . . ."

" Never ! " said the Wise One hotly.

" You will lose your appetite," ordered the priest sternly.

" Oh, very well," said the Wise One, " but don't forget what happened last time I missed my meal."

" And you will leave it behind where the little Luisita can find it, that they may not starve before they reach the border." He pointed and the Wise One crossly complied.

" To starve at our age," said the priest light heartedly, " is better than to pay an insurance premium." It was not for nothing that he had been nicknamed Pius the Practical at his seminary.

" And what of the man who killed ? " asked the Wise One.

" That one," said the priest, " must give himself up as an act of expiation."

The oleander tree sobbed anew.

" But," he added hastily, " since the gun went off in self-defence and the death of the man was accidental, they will only send him to gaol for a time."

" Pfui ! " said the oleander.

" And there," went on the priest, more loudly, " he will atone for the—um—arbitrary borrowing of Miguel's money-bags, and one or two other little matters, for he is a hot-headed young man."

The oleander tree said something rude but the priest failed to hear it.

" And after that ? " enquired the Wise One, eyeing his food-bowl hungrily.

" And thereinafter," said the priest with a twinkle, " I would invite a foolish friend of mine to dine with me."

" Let's go," said the Wise One. He rose.

So did the boulder.

" A pretty pair of plotters," screeched Dulcinea the Shrew, and

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she picked up her petticoats and ran, while the two old gentlemen picked up their skirts and came running after her.

And as she ran, Dulcinea flung verbal stillettos of living venom over her shoulder at them. She was going to tell the village that the Inglés who had held up Miguel Money-bags was on the run. And that José the hot-head, his killer, was in their midst. And she was going to brand little Carlo as a son of a gun-man. And—clearly this was the worst threat of all—she was going to tell her mistress, the Widow Alborado, just what had been done with her poor box pesetas! And all at the top of her voice.

Till the Wise One was forced to drown her upbraiding with a great ringing of his bell; and thus, helter-skelter and hugger-mugger, they came clattering over the bridge and down the nine and seventy steps.

From the sun-baked square High Sierra gazed at its livid Greek chorus with sullen disapproval.

Was the end of the world coming after all? High Sierra hoped not. Right now it was busy laying its garlands of flowers at the foot of the shrine of Our Lady of Showers, ready for that monthly act of optimism, the prayer for rain.

"Neighbours! Neighbours! To me! To me!" screeched Dulcinea. "Aie!"

On an impulse the Wise One had picked up a dwarf cactus and thrown it at her. He missed. Unlucky!

To High Sierra, suffering from reaction, spiritual and spirituous, this was more than too much. As one village it hurled everything it happened to have with it, on it, or near it, rapturously into the air. Soon the square was full of flying marrows, pomegranates, hats, boots and china—preferably other people's. Tables and chairs rained down light hearted as confetti.

Dulcinea made to mount a table to address the populace. Wham! a well-aimed melon struck her amidships. On second thoughts she crept beneath the table. This did not stop her from screeching. Vengeance was hers! "In the name of Miguel Money-bags, he who has died the death, I call upon you, good neighbours, to avenge yourselves upon his Assassin! Assassin! Ass . . ." What was that she could just define, as she peered out from the table with her one eye? A familiar shape, undeniably rotund, effulgently protruberant it was the pot-belly of Miguel Money-bags.

From the porch of the church the priest smiled happily. He had known all along. For had he not come upon Miguel at the cross-roads with scarce a breath in his body, and had him cared for at the monastery, which was why he had been absent from his overwrought parish for longer than had been anticipated.

And as for High Sierra, it stopped throwing things and began

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to laugh. And there it staggered, laughing wildly, hysterically and with tears running down its cheeks, at the sight of Dulcinea crouching under her table, confronted by her dead man, and hardly able to credit the evidence of her own one eye.

Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!
Ho! Ho! Ho! Ho!
Hee! Hee! Hee! Hee!

High Sierra, tickled to death, was killing itself with laughter.

And now, out of the church and down thirty three of the nine and seventy steps and into the laughing sun-baked square wound the solemn processional for the prayer for rain, with Little Carlo at its head swinging a censor. His eyes were black beads of terror, and his face was like a ghost. Nothing could save him now.

Inexorably the processional advanced on the shrine of Our Lady of Showers, their voices raised in ancient chant. More soberly the village stood around with here and there a hiccough. It was time for the golden grille to be opened.

Little Carlo lifted a hand to it that trembled. Now all was lost indeed.

A great hush had fallen on the village. Slowly the golden grille swung open. Little Carlo dared not to breathe. But forlornly, and very bravely, he fixed his gaze upon the open shrine. And there, smiling down at him, and out to all High Sierra, stood Our Lady of Showers, kind and gentle and infinitely whole.

And only the Wise One knew that just above the girdle of her beautiful blue cloak was a Juniper stain.

And even as Little Carlo wondered, and High Sierra adored, there fell the first, the unexpected, the most welcome miracle—a great plop of rain.

* * *

CONTINUITY

An Englishman who visited a Red Indian reserve in North America had been told that the Indians had amazing memories, and to satisfy himself he asked one of them: "What did you have for breakfast two months ago today?"

Without hesitation the Indian replied, "Egg."

Some years later the Englishman found himself in the district again, met the same man and gave the traditional Indian greeting: "How."

"Poached," replied the Indian.

From the "Yorkshire Post"

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SAM SMALL AND THE POLKINGTHORPE GIANT

It's fair puzzling, indeed it is, and that's the truth

by ERIC KNIGHT

POLKINGTHORPE BRIG isn't such a big place, even as villages go; but by gum, it can produce men.

In fact, for a place its size, as you might say, it has produced more famous men, in a manner of speaking, than any other place in the world.

For instance it has Sam Small, who is famous the world over, as all men know. And then it's got Ian Cawper.

Ian Cawper is really famous. He's the biggest and strongest lad in all Yorkshire—which means, of course, all England. For everyone knows that inch for inch and pound for pound a Yorkshireman's worth two from any other county—especially—well perhaps we'd better leave it at that.

Of course, Ian's a little thick in the head; but they don't hold that against a man much in Yorkshire. And, true, he's a fearful man to see when he's angered; but that's very seldom. Most times Ian is pleasant enough and affable enough. Whenever there's anything heavy that needs lugging in the village, the folk always get hold of a bairn and say: "Run up to Ian Cawper's cottage and tell him there's summat here that nob'dy but him can do."

Ian will come down, generally carrying the bairn on his shoulder, and after they've explained to him carefully what they want, he'll move or lug or lift whatever it is, such as a walnut bureau or a boulder or a cart stuck in the mud—and very pleasantly he'll do it, too.

But there's a thing or two about Ian that fair puzzles the older people in the village.

To come right out with it, the fact is that Ian doesn't look much like any other Cawper that ever lived, not even as far back as old Capper Wambley can remember. True, the Cawpers have always been a strong breed, so he takes after them in that. But Ian is a fair, blue-eyed lad, while all the Cawpers before him were very dark—so dark, in fact, that Ian's father was known as Black Cawper. Ian's fairness couldn't have come from his mother's side, either, for she's a Motherwaite, and the Motherwaites are a darkish clan.

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It's fair puzzling, indeed it is, and that's the truth, as the village people say. Naturally, they don't say it when Ian's around, for Ian Cawper's a fearful man when he does get angry, and could break a man in two with his bare hands if so be he wished.

But people do talk once in a while, and one night Sam Small got talking down at *The Spread Eagle*. What his story means, you must judge for yourself. As to how true it is—well, Sam Small's as truthful a Yorkshireman as ever blew the foam off four or five pints of good ale in an evening.

Ian's father, Black Cawper—so goes Sam's story—was a big strong man who was ready to fight, feast, or wrestle at the drop of a hat. He wasn't as big as Ian has turned out to be, but he was shrewder than Ian will ever be. And he was more given to sudden tempers and to daring other men and showing off his strength.

Black Cawper was a favourite chap up on the moor on Sunday afternoons. For then, as now, all the men of the village would meet up on the moor to show off feats of nimbleness or strength, or to ask each other puzzling questions and riddles, or to bet on their dogs. They'd run their whippets, or hold terrier contests by putting their tykes in a barrel with a score or so of rats to see how many the dog could kill in sixty seconds. And sometimes, by lucky chance, they might meet a bunch of lads from another village who would be looking for a bit of a fight. That's the way it's always been on Sunday afternoons.

Now on this Sunday afternoon about twenty five years ago, so Sam Small says, a stranger came cutting across the moor who seemed by his speech to be from over Malton way.

They asked him if he'd like to fight, and he said no ; they asked him if he wanted to buy a dog and he said no ; they asked him if he'd like to wrestle or run a race for a bit of side-bet and he said no. They had just about concluded he was a pawky sort of chap until he said that if it were a matter of knerr and spell, by gum, he'd be willing to back himself roundly to the tune of a few shillings.

Now if there's anything the lads of Polkingthorpe Brig pride themselves on besides fighting and dogs, it's their skill at knerr and spell, a game requiring strength, speed and judgment. Many years ago this game drifted from Yorkshire up into Scotland where, in a much deteriorated and simplified form, it became known as golf.

So when the stranger said he'd play, he was rapidly taken up.

It turned out, however, that this lad was nobody's mug. He was a lanky, lithe chap with a click to his wrists when he swung that sent the ball sailing champion distances. One by one he took the money away from the Polkingthorpe men until there was only Black

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Cawper left, and the light was beginning to fade.

" All or nowt in a final match," Black Cawper offered.

The lad said it was so for his pile of sixteen shillings, and he put up such a mighty ding-dong battle that at the last stroke Black Cawper needed the wellnigh impossible score of 262 to tie, 263 to win. But Black Cawper only laughed and flexed his muscles in his big arms and spit on his hands. He tapped the tip-up smartly, and when the ball rose into the air he wrapped the springy club round his neck and swung. He hit the ball fair just as it was beginning to fall, and belted it a giant clout such as the men there had never seen before. Away the ball went, screaming off in a straight, rising line, over a far hill-top, out of sight.

Black Cawper laughed his hard laugh.

" Two hunned and sixty three," he offered.

This meant that if the stranger could reach the ball in less than 263 leaping strides, the score counted to him. If he couldn't, it counted to Black Cawper, who thereby won the match.

The Malton lad looked up at the hill and shook his head. He was a fine judge of distances, and knew he couldn't reach the ball in the required number.

" Tha's t'better lad o' t'two on us," he said, and conceded the game. They shook hands and paid off. The matches were over for that day.

" Well," Black Cawper said, " now let's off and find ma dobbie."

But the men all shuffled their feet and coughed and spat.

" Nay, Black," they said, " us'll away and meet thee later down at t'*Eagle*."

Then Black Cawper laughed, for he knew why they were backing away as they looked at the bleak hill, now rapidly sinking back into the evening darkness. For over that hill was Wada's Keep.

Most everyone in Polkingthorpe Brig had seen Wada's Keep—but not after dark.

You went up there in the daytime when you were lads. On some summer holiday day you went—a bunch of you together, of course—and even then it was bad enough. If you had courage, you went right up to it, plunging through the bracken and stumbling over rocks. For the land there was no longer flat moor, but rocky and broken into strange crags.

You kept on, being wrapped deeper in the lonesomeness and barrenness of that place. And when you got there, you didn't dare to talk. All you did was stand by the Keep, whose stones were damp and green with their ancient age. At least twelve hundred years old it was—that's what the schoolmaster said the day he went up there. He talked about Saxon defenders and cromlechs. That

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word cromlech, it made it worse, it did.

No one needed to talk of things like that when you could stand there in that silence and look at the round tower and its walls made of mighty boulders that no human hands could have lifted into place. But those boulders had been nothing for Wada, the giant. He'd lifted them up into place as nicely as a mason these days sets in a little brick.

You knew the awe of that place when you stood there thinking things like that, standing in the land where no living thing moved as far as you could see down on the wide stretches. You smelled the dust of the dried bracken and against it the damp smell of stones in unused places, and then you'd hear the fearful, lonesome cry of a peewit, and at that you'd shudder and start home, walking quickly and more quickly—all of you. Until you came over the moor and could see Polkingthorpe again, and then you slowed down and laughed and pretended you'd never walked fast with the terror of unknown things breathing on the back of your neck.

And that was the terror all the men felt that Sunday afternoon when Black Cawper faced towards Wada's land and said he was going there in the dusk. He laughed in his hard, bold way, and said :

" Would ye leave a lad find his dobbie alone ? "

They rocked on their feet and coughed and spat. And then Black Cawper blazed into one of his sudden tempers—Cawper's mad higs, the men called them.

" Ba gum," he roared, " that's ma pet dobbie and Ah'm not off to lose it. Ah'm bahn up theer, and what's more, one on ye's cooming up wi' me to bear witness Ah showed no fear. Here, Sam Small, tha'll coom wi' me."

" Nay, not me," Sam said, stoutly.

" Tha'll coom when Ah say," Cawper shouted. And he jumped over and caught Sam by the scruff of his neck and slung him over his shoulder.

" Here, let me dahn, Black," Sam pleaded. " It's ma teatime, and Mully'll be mawngier nor owd hell if Ah'm late."

Black Cawper paid no attention to Sam. Instead he swung about and faced the hill. He shook his knerr and spell club and lifted his head and shouted :

" Now, giant ! If so be as tha lives in them hills, clear out o' t'road ! For here cooms Black Cawper, and wi' a witness to boot ! "

But when he said that, from the skyline came a quick glow of light and then, far away, the distant rumble of thunder. And as the watching men drew in their breath sharply, one of the dogs lifted his head and howled in a manner like to curdle your blood. Then, like a flock of birds that obey an unsounded signal, all the men turned about, and a mad charge of men and dogs went stampeding

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off down to the village.

When they were gone Black Cawper stood a while, and then, slowly, one foot stamping down before the other, he started up that hill with Sam Small over his left shoulder and his knerr and spell club in his right hand. At the top of the hill he lifted Sam to the ground.

" Now, lad," he said, " us'll find ma dobbie. And tha'd better stick close to me, because t'owd Nick hissen knaws what maught grab thee if tha tried to run hoam alone this time a' neight."

He chuckled deep down in his chest, but Sam only shivered. He glanced around fearfully, Sam did, and resolved not to be left alone that night if he could help it. So he followed close behind Black Cawper and they kicked at the tufts of grass and pulled aside clumps of gorse as they looked for the ball. But nowhere was a ball to be seen.

" O' course it's not here," Black Cawper said. " It maun ha' gone far and away down into t'valley here. For surely it were the championest clout a lad ivver give a dobbie."

So they went deeper and deeper into the country, following the line the ball had taken as best they could. But no ball could they find.

" Now lewk here, Black," Sam said at last. " No man can say tha hesn't dared to hunt, but it's pitch black now and we'll noan find it in the dark. Sitha, lad, let's coom up tomort morn and lewk for it."

" Us has gate to be at t'pit and digging coal by dawn," Black said, " and Ah'm bound Ah'm off to find ma dobbie toneight. There'll be a gradely moon out soon."

" Nay, coom away, Black lad," Sam coaxed. " Just think, Black, it's suppertime, and there'll be a nice fire i't'fireplace, and a fine, steaming pot o' tea, and some hot toasted scones or muffins, all swimming in butter ; or a pikelet or two and some sliced ham, wi' a wedge or two o' nice cold pork pie—or happen a bloater, all fried to a turn. Tha likes bloaters, Ah knaw . . ."

" Nay," said Black.

" Eigh, but happen there'd be a gert big foaming quart o' fine beer. Wouldn'ta like a mug o' beer that'd mak' a chap smack his lips and . . ."

" Nay," said Black.

" Not even if, happen, somebody were to stand thee that quart o' fine beer ? "

" Nay ! "

" Not for a quart o' beer ? Not even if Ah were to say outright it'd be me what stood the price on it for thee ? "

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" Ah said nay," roared Black Cawper. " Ah've said Ah'm off to find ma dobbie, and find it Ah will—if it tak's all neight, and no matter whose bailiwick it chances to be in."

Right when he said that Sam shivered, for Black's great voice went rolling out into the darkness and rumbled up into the crags, and like an echo came back a voice that boomed like a peal of thunder, saying :

" Be this what th'art looking for ? "

At that moment there was a lifting light and the rising moon shot from behind a ragged cloud. Black and Sam, standing stock-still, looked out across the rocky hollow and saw a man standing on a flat crag—a great, well-set-up lad he was, with a blond beard that shone in the moonlight.

For a long time they all stood without moving and the moments passed. The first sound was when Black Cawper laughed his bold rumbling laugh.

" Tak' thus," he said, and he thrust his club into Sam's hand. Sam heard him drawing in his breath through his nose, drawing it in and filling his chest so that it expanded, wider and wider. Then, with his head thrust forward and his arms hanging wide from bent elbows, Black Cawper took the first step forward. He kept on steadily, evenly, his metal-shod clogs coming down regularly as he went forwards step by step to where the man waited.

Poor Sam's heart turned over with terror, but he felt that this was no time for a lad to leave his chum, even if he died for it. So he scrambled along behind Black, gripping the club firmly.

Cawper went on until he reached the flat rock where the man waited with his legs far apart and his thumbs hooked lightly into his waist-belt. Within an arm's length Black Cawper halted and took the same position—his feet planted apart and his thumbs resting inside the waist of his corduroy trousers. Thus they stood and looked each other up and down slowly and carefully, not saying a word.

Sam waited in fear as the minutes passed ; for although Black Cawper was a well-set man, the bearded chap was bigger by almost a foot.

They said no word, and when the time was done Black Cawper turned and picked up the dobbie that was shining on the ground. The way he did it was a dare-devil way, for he turned his back completely on the other man as if he scorned him. It was a bold, contemptuous thing to do, and Sam gripped the club firmly. But the bearded man made no move, only following Cawper with his eyes that seemed to smile.

Cawper turned the dobbie over carefully, pretending to examine every part of it, his back still towards the other man.

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" Aye," he said finally. " This is ma dobbie."

He turned round and laughed loudly in the face of the stranger.

" Now, Ah gate what Ah coom for, Ah'll be off on ma road hoam," he said.

He waited patiently, but there was no answer.

" Aye, that's champion," Sam said quickly. " Thanking this lad varry politely for his help, us'll be off."

Black did not look at Sam. He stared at the unmoving man on the rock.

" Nay, but on t'other hand," Cawper said, " Ah maught want to stay."

The other man did not move, so Black Cawper went near to him, and squinting his eyes and looking up through his knotted eyebrows he said :

" Ah nivver turned ma back on noa man yet be-out being polite-like, as tha mought say. Soa Ah'm axing thee : wouldt'a like to feight, lad ? "

The blond man laughed.

" Eigh, there's all night for sport yet," he answered. " Sit thee down here for a while—if tha hast time to spare."

" Ah've gate as much time to spare as any other man," Cawper said, " and brass enow to sit ony place ma feet can carry me to."

So they sat, each on a boulder, facing each other. Sam, not knowing what to do, sat on the ground, hugging the club. For a long time nothing was said, but Sam, knowing Black Cawper, could see he was getting ready to do a bit of thinking.

Nearly half an hour passed in silence, and then Black said, suddenly :

" If a hen and a hawf laid an egg and a hawf in a day and a hawf, how much would one hen lay in a week ? "

He looked cunningly at the big man, for Black Cawper prided himself on being a foxy sort of a chap at thinking. But right smack back came the answer :

" Four eggs and two-thirds on the way to lay another."

Sam Small drew in his breath quickly, for he knew of no stranger who'd been able to answer that problem before. Many a pint of beer Black Cawper won from strangers at the inn with that one. Moreover the answer given was the right one, for that's what the schoolmaster had told them was the right solution when they'd taken the puzzle to him to be worked out.

When this stranger gave the right answer, Black Cawper nodded his head, for he began to see he was up against a very unusual opponent this time. So he went back to doing a bit of thinking again. He thought and thought until the moon was rising up in the sky. Then he got up suddenly and walking to Sam, took the club from

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his hand. Looking to see if the stranger was watching, Black Cawper took the dobbie from his pocket. Not speaking a word, he threw it up in the air with a fine careless twirl of his hand, and then swung back with his club. The dobbie flashed up in the moonlight and began to fall. Just when it was a little over waist-high, Black's club came swinging round and caught that dobbie a crack that sounded sweet and true.

Away that ball went like a line of silver. Then it was gone, slanting up into the night. But even then they could hear it whooshing away with a dying moan in the black quietness. For a long time they waited, breathless, and the minutes passed. Faintly they heard at last the sound of the dobbie tacking and tumbling on the stones far across the valley.

Then Black nodded his head in satisfaction and sat down.

The big man said never a word, but he got up and looked carefully at Black's club. He took it in one hand and whooshed it round a few times. Black's club was a special one, so heavy that no man but himself could swing it with the flash of accuracy and speed that knerr and spell demands. However, the stranger seemed amused by it and put it aside. Instead he picked up a great ash cudgel and selected a stone. As big round as a man's two fists, that stone was. But the big chap flipped it up into the air and swung quickly. There was a crash as if the stone had exploded, and Sam Small blinked as if he'd been blinded.

How far that stone went Sam never knew, for as he waited for the sound of it falling, there came a flash of light on the horizon and a mumbling and a bumbling of thunder far away.

"Eigh, they maun be hevin a storm up i' t'Malvern Hills," he said.

He felt he must say something, for the other two men never spoke. They looked at each other, and the blond man smiled. Black Cawper knotted his brows in anger and suddenly cried:

"Ah'll run thee a race for ten bob!"

"Good! To the tower and back," the other man said.

At the mention of that tower, Sam did shiver for fair. But Black Cawper hesitated hardly a moment.

"Done," he said.

"Touch the tower wall and back to Tichie here," the stranger said.

At this Sam got fair blazing, for although he wasn't a big man, no one had ever called him Tichie before—for that word means a dwarf man in Yorkshire. But he consoled himself with the thought that now the stranger would be beaten, for few light men were as fast on their feet as Black Cawper, and surely no big man could best him in a

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foot race. But before he could think much of this, Black shouted :

" Ready ? Go ! "

Away they went into the darkness and Sam could hear the mighty churning and whortling of their bodies tearing through the thick bracken and the crashing of their feet upon the rocks. The sounds died away and then grew again. He jumped to his feet to see who was first, and when they came into view they were neck and neck. But right at the last moment the stranger seemed to glide ahead without altering his stride and flying past he tapped Sam with the tip of his hand.

It was only a light touch, yet Sam felt as though he'd been struck with a jolt of electricity, and he felt himself going rolling and abowling head-over-tip down the rocks. When he picked himself up and got back Cawper was paying off the bet, his forehead knotted in anger.

Now that the blond man had won the foot-race, Sam realized that Black Cawper was up against something the likes of which he'd never known before, and that this night was to see a contest to be remembered. For he knew that Black Cawper would never give in. And neither he did.

In that moonlight night up in Wada's country Black Cawper matched the stranger at all the things he knew, one by one. They matched at games of cunning and games of strength ; at jumping for height and jumping for distances ; at heaving stones for distances and throwing stones for aim ; at lifting boulders of greater and greater size above their heads. And always the stranger won.

Finally, Black Cawper had not a farthing left to bet with. So he jumped up in anger and tore off his coat.

" Now lad," he roared, " there's nobbut one thing left. There's gate to be a feight, between me and thee ! "

" For what stake ? "

" Nay, Ah gate nowt left. We maun feight for t'fun on it."

" My heart is happy," the blond man said.

" That's spoken like an honest chap," Black said and tore off his shirt.

They both stripped to the waist, and knotted their neckerchiefs carefully about their middles. Black Cawper flexed his knotty arms and lifted his chest, all covered and matted with black hair. The other man's skin shone in the moonlight, pink and hairless as a baby's.

" Now, lad," Black said, " how'll us feight—standups or knock-downs ? Us maun do this reight and proper."

" Nay, the way matters not," the other replied, lightly.

Sam waited anxiously. For there are two kinds of fighting up in

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Yorkshire. The standups is a softy sort of fighting that is drifting in from the Southern counties, in which it is quite useless to knock a man down, for all you must do then is stand back and let him get up again.

Now the knockdown is the real Yorkshire way of fighting, for if you once strike your man down then everything else follows in a sensible sort of way—for instance, you may jump on him, or kneel on him and pummel him, or if you think it best you may stand off and kick. This is a most honest way of fighting, especially since the clogs of Yorkshire have fine, pointed toes that are capped with brass, whereas the men from the Southern counties have only blunt-toed boots.

So Sam waited breathlessly, for a man who feels he is to be beaten will always pick the cowardly Southern style which allows him to escape whenever he wishes to lie down and fight no more. But he was proud of Black Cawper when he roared:

"Knockdowns—onless th'art flaid!"

The blond man laughed and waved his hand to say it was all the same to him. Then, bending, their arms hanging low, they began to circle each other on the flat rock. For nearly five minutes they moved thus, and the only thing heard in the clear night was the shifting of their feet on the rock and the deep drawing of the breath into their chests.

Suddenly without a warning, the blond man charged first. But Black Cawper was ready. Like the blink of an eye he swung his clogged foot and kicked the man a mighty kick. So fast that you could hardly see it, he kicked again—and a third time. Then they swung round and faced each other once more, and Black Cawper laughed deep in his chest.

The other man should have dropped, but instead he charged in again and this time from the position of his feet Sam could see he was going to kick back at Black. But Black knew a trick worth two of that. Without giving ground, he half-turned in a flash, standing on one foot and holding the other foot with his hands.

He held the foot knee-high, and with the metal-shod sole turned out. He did it just as the other man's leg swung forward, and it was like a shield in defence. Sam Small heard a sound as if the shin-bone were splintering when the stranger's leg crashed against the upheld foot.

But the big man gave no sign, and instead kept coming right in and the two locked their arms. For a time they circled, each bent over, head to head like stags in the rutting season. They pushed and swayed, each feeling for a stronger hold and kicking at each other's legs.

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It seemed to be deadlock, until Black Cawper shifted quickly and reaching under grasped the other's beard. He pulled down with all his strength, yanking the man's head down ; and at the same time he brought up his knee with a force that smashed it into his opponent's face and sent him staggering back, with blood gushing from his mouth.

Without halting a second, Black put down his head and charged. He caught his foe in the belly with his head, and the force of the butting charge sent the man flying back. His body went wildly through the air and crashed on to the rocks six feet below the flat crag. Even while it was falling Black was following up, and charging over the rock he leaped out into space, meaning to come down feet first on the body of the man below.

But somehow the man managed to roll aside with a lightning twist, and scrambling to his feet he locked his arms right about his enemy. Thus they stood, chest to chest, and Black grinned, for he had never yet met a man who could withstand his grip. So he squeezed, tighter and tighter. Sam saw the cords and veins stand out on his neck, as he put on the pressure, but the other man only waited.

At last Black was done, and then it was the other's turn. He pressed tighter and tighter, seeking to crush in Black's ribs. But Black, waiting as the other had waited, could not be beaten that way, either.

At a deadlock again, they began trying to lift each other, to pluck their foe from his feet and throw him. But they seemed evenly matched there, too. They swayed and staggered, crashing about and panting.

Thus, while Sam Small watched, Black Cawper and the stranger fought all that moonlight night in the land beside Wada's Keep. They crashed over the rocks and locked together they rolled down the slopes. They tore themselves free and charged each other. They wrestled and struck and kicked themselves apart and came back to the locked embrace again.

So the moon sloped over the sky and the wind blew cold and the night went past as they fought on.

And then, slowly, Sam saw that Black Cawper was to be beaten. He charged courageously as ever, but his arms were lifting more slowly. And in a final locked struggle, the bearded man at last bent Black Cawper back, farther and farther. Then he lifted him from the ground and hurled him across the rocks.

Black Cawper, his face covered with blood, lifted himself up and came back, but again he was thrown. For a second time he lifted himself, shaking his head savagely as if to get it clear. He charged in once more, and once more was thrown. And this third time, try as

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he might, he found himself unable to rise. He pushed with his arms upon the ground, but they would not lift his body.

But even then he was not beaten in spirit, for as the blond man advanced, instead of wrapping his arms about his head to protect his skull, the way beaten men do, Black Cawper lay there proudly and defiantly, looking up sidewise at his enemy, but without any pleading in his eyes.

The big man jumped down to where Black lay. Then he said :

" All this night we have contested, thee and me."

Black Cawper did not answer. All there was to hear was the breath coming and going as his chest heaved for air. He tried to lift himself and managed to push up his shoulders with his straightened arms. But he could get no farther, though he tried until the beads of sweat stood out on his forehead.

Then, with a quick movement, the blond man reached down and with a great lift hauled him to his feet. Without saying a word he helped him into his shirt and coat. When that was done the man lifted his head and looked about and said :

" But a little while longer and tha wouldst have beaten me."

His voice sounded sad and far away as he went on :

" Ah, and if tha nobbut had ! For when there comes another like unto me, then Ah am released and may go ma way ! "

Black sat with his head bowed. The big man looked about him, turning his head.

" Eigh, but Ah maun go. Fare thee well, lad."

Black Cawper rose suddenly and held the other's arm.

" Nay, tha maun't go," he said. " Ah want thee to coom hoam wi' me and meet ma wife."

" Thy wife ? What for ? "

Black Cawper stood up firm and held the other's hand proudly.

" Well, lad," he said, " Ah'm a Yorkshireman born and a Yorkshireman bred, soa Ah can nobbut speak like a true sportsman. Tha's bested me at cunning and tha's bested me at speed ; tha's bested me at strength and tha's bested me at feighting. Soa there's nobbut one thing left for an honest lad to do. Ba gum, Ah'd like to tak' thee hoam and hev a pup off'n thee."

The blond man shook his head, quickly.

" Nay, Ah maun be off," he said.

He started away, and then suddenly he stopped as if struck by a surprising idea. He spoke almost as if to himself.

" For when there is another like unto me, then am Ah released and may go ma way," he said. " And another can guard the Keep against the invader."

Quickly, gladly, he reknotted his kerchief. He started to smile

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and say: "Ah'll go wi' ye," but then faintly, yet loud as faint sounds are at dawn, there came a cockcrow from the village far away. Sadly, sadly, the blond man looked at the east and cried:

"Nay, nay! Ah maun go!"

He turned and raced away before they could stop him and was gone from sight like the winking of an eye. But from the hills came his booming voice, fading away, and Sam says he heard him call, saying:

"A month from today! Full moon! Ah'll be back and tak' ye up on that—a mooonth from todaaay!"

Then his voice rumbled off into the hills and became one with the muttering thunder of a dawn storm.

Now that is the story that Sam Small tells. He says he can remember the exact date—as most men in the village can. For Sam was young then, and worked as a collier lad.

It was long before he went into the mill and invented his famous self-doffing spindle.

And coming down from the moor that grey morning, Sam Small and Black Cawper were so late they had no time to go home to their cottages. For they were on the six a.m. shift at the pit, and so they went right to work.

And that very day was the day of the big do at the Silkstone Pit Number Two. It was the day of the disaster when Sam, racing from his gallery, saw Black Cawper standing like a Colossus, his great back arched and holding up a sagging cross-timber.

Everyone knows that is true, for they still tell you about it in Polkingthorpe Brig—how Black Cawper held up that great timber and roared in his bull voice to the men to hurry, and how as the men in his gallery ducked under his arched body that great timber pressed him down, lower and lower.

Black Cawper never came out of that pit, for as Sam Small ran along towards the shaft there came a rumble and a roar and the roof behind them caved in. Sam Small and seven others reached the cage in safety but in that level sixty seven lives were lost. Sam and the other seven came out to tell the story.

So no one can mistake the date on which Black Cawper died. And no one can mistake the date on which Ian Cawper was born—ten months later.

Now we are not too handy on arithmetic and such tricky matters; but, as we say in the village, there seems to be summat varry, varry fooney soomwheers.

But, naturally, nobody ever says anything much about it because—well, Ian's affable enough most of the time; but if he

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ever got real angry, and ever took such an idea in his big, blond head, why he could break any man in two with his bare hands. It's almost supernatural, how strong Ian Cawper is.

* * *

A HUNTING WE WILL GO!

But neither booted nor spurred, we seek merely for information! Can *you* supply it? Count one point for recognizing the quarry, one for the source and one for the author, making 27 points in all. The answers are on page 73.

1. *"They sought it with thimbles, they sought it with care;*
   They pursued it with forks and hope;
   They threatened its life with a railway-share;
   They charmed it with smiles and soap."

2. *"Go get her a flannel waistcoat and flannel drawers, ma'am, if you wish to keep her alive," urged this gallant gentleman. "But my advice is, kill the poor creature at once!"*

3. *Stolen away by a beautiful youth, she was sought by her husband and a fleet of a thousand ships.*

4. *"Who, or why, or which, or what," was this venerable potentate of whom nothing is known but much surmised?*

5. *Nine bean-rows, a hive for the honey-bee, and a peaceful life in a bee-loud glade—these were the quest of this would-be-solitary.*

6. *He had the "wild stag's foot, the lion's heart," and he carried the Tartar challenge into the Persian camp—but found in his fatal opponent his father.*

7. *"Is this the man?" the seamen asked, as they sought the one who had killed the bird of good omen and predestined them all to a terrifying doom.*

8. *To see her was to love her, and love but her for ever, but "she gaed o'er the Border," and was lost to her lover.*

9. *"The bare black cliff clang'd round him" as he ran, having found the lake wherein to throw the sword of a dying king.*

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ANOTHER DAY

It was a sound he knew too well, the full, melodious note of an otterhound on the scent

by C. CRAVEN

THE bull-trout basked in cunning pleasure just where his body merged into the brown shadows of the shelving bank. The river just there was deep and the willows trailed their long fronds in the water. Further on, the reeds afforded cover and there were crannies in the boulders where the old trout could lie in wait or in hiding.

Many anglers had courted him with tempting bait in vain. He was too crafty to rise and too old to make mistakes. Men were the least of his foes. He had fought many a battle with his own kind. His scaly body bore scars, but he had always won. He was undisputed monarch of the pool.

Two miles upstream a pearly chain of bubbles strung out on the surface of the water marked the passage of the bull-trout's enemy, the old dog otter. Time and again, the otter had come to the pool where the big trout swam and the cunning of fish and otter had been so evenly matched, both still lived to meet another day.

The otter was supple as a snake and as swift. He raised his sleek flat head from the water, whistled softly and dived again, so smoothly, the water enveloped him with scarcely a ripple. Only the silvery bubbles of his vent strung out behind him betrayed his whereabouts.

He swerved and winnowed through the iris stems below. He could see both above him and below without effort; the dimness of the underwater was clear enough for him.

He was old, but full of vitality and cunning. He had hunted this river, fifteen miles of it, since he had been taken to the shallows as a half-grown lit by his mother and taught to swim. He had been caught by one pad in a trap and escaped, badly torn, but in time that had healed, leaving only a twisted toe. He had fouled the nets laid by old Grannon, the poacher, down by the trout pool one night, and but for the fact that old Grannon had once had a trained otter to fish for him and retained a soft spot for all otters ever since, the old otter would then have drowned. The old

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man had sworn at the struggling beast, drawn the net and otter up the bank and hurled the savage, hissing animal back into the river with a guttural warning that one more trick like that with the nets would be the last.

The old otter knew every yard of the fern-clad banks of the river, from the quiet reaches where the willows grew and the old trout sunned himself in high summer to the swiftly running water of the weir where the sides of the valley rose darkly, covered with spruce and fir.

He knew the sound of the hunting horn that heralded the otter hounds, the poles, the heavy footsteps of the men. He also knew the quiet anglers who came to fish in the evenings when the big fish were less shy and long shadows fell across the river to camouflage angler and otter alike.

The otter knew the banks excavated by water voles, the earthy caves where the verges shelved under, the dykes, the marshy tracts and hollow fallen trees. All these things composed his little world.

The air was warm and sweet; spring was drifting into summer, and already, the trees above the water cast long shadows and were broadening in leaf. The otter swam and rolled in idle pleasure for a time. It was early morning and the mist still hung greyly over the fields.

Experience had taught him this was the safest hour, but he was very watchful. Even when, in one swerving movement, he caught a fish, his strong jaws holding the thrashing little body as he surfaced and climbed on to his favourite boulder under the crooked ash tree, he only took one bite of the flaky shoulder meat before sliding back into the flowing water to swim in a wide arc of inspection lest he be in danger. He returned, finished the fish and stretched out his body on the boulder. The sunshine warmed him like a caress, the river murmured softly as it rippled by.

A little later, having cleaned his muzzle to his liking, shaken himself like a dog and sniffed the air at leisure, he slid back into the river again, swam on the surface to the shelving bank beneath the willows and dived, deeper, to the underwater entrance of the holt where his mate lay suckling two lits.

The holt had two entrances, the submerged one and another fifteen yards distant up the river bank. The nest itself was a mere platform of reeds and rushes, well out of the water, so exposed that in winter the mother otter had been covered with a fine drift of snow when the blizzard howled down the river.

The old otter had helped her to excavate the nest before the lits were born. It was her first litter, for she was young. But the

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old dog otter had fathered many others in the past. To him, it was only the pattern of his life—hunting, courting, mating and hunting again.

The lits were round and fat, with round, brilliant eyes and blunt-nosed faces. Their fur was dark and thick, their ears small and curled, like petals. Their mother hissed gently to them as they pushed and nosed her, making mewling noises. Soon, they must be taught to swim, or when the river rose they would drown.

Seeing her mate approaching, the mother stirred, stretched herself and turned her whiskered muzzle to watch him. She was weary of being in the holt and hungry. She whistled, turned her back on him and slid away down the watery tunnel, leaving him to guard the lits until her return.

He shook his wet fur. Keeping a wary eye on the lits, he nosed amongst the rushes on the bank. The lits hissed and tumbled about in the nest, watching him. He killed a vole and let them have it; but they were not hungry and played with the tiny wet body as a cat will play with a mouse. The old otter spread himself out to dry on the reeds and sunned himself as he watched the water flow by, aware of every movement, both in the water and the holt.

The lits were big enough to learn to swim now. The old otters knew exactly what to do.

They pushed the reluctant whimpering lits before them down to the reeds at the waterside. The mother began to explore the nooks and crannies in the shallows. She turned over stones and thrust her webbed feet into the hollows, routing out small creatures. The dog otter dived and emerged with an unwary fish.

They encouraged the lits to forage for themselves and put easy kills in their way. The mother otter ducked the lits and the old otter drove them deeper, forcing them to use their rudderlike tails and short, powerful legs in the water.

The lits gained confidence and swam for the pleasure of it, emerging from the water glossy and sleek as seals, shaking themselves as their parents did to rid their coats of water, and frisking about on the bank with a queer, galloping gait as they lunged and dodged in playful energy.

Gradually the lits grew, became longer in the body, lost their puppy fat and acquired a sinuous grace. Their backs showed faint tinges of silver, their snouts lengthened into bewhiskered masks. They grew cunning enough to stalk the bigger fish in the deeper pools, dragging their kill from the water on to some favourite stone or bank to eat the flaky shoulder meat. They were dainty feeders, cleaning their fur after each meal. In the summer evenings, the

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four otters would play together, whisking about in and out of the water, hunting for eels.

The old dog otter led them to the fishing grounds far upstream. He knew where the bull-trout basked. Year after year, he had stalked them cunningly. The trout were cunning too, especially the oldest one, the otter knew. The oldest trout was too wise to be caught, but the otter had killed many less wary ones in the shadowy gloom of the deep pool in other years.

But the otter was growing old and the big trout were very swift; he did not catch them so easily now. He had to watch and wait. The young otters would not be cunning enough to outwit the big trout yet, but they would learn to lie in wait, to watch, to swim so swiftly under the wary fish, they would seize the scaly body in one lightning thrust, as the old otter had done in the past, and then there would be the feasting on fat and tender flesh. They would bask, and roll and swim homewards, full of content; their bellies full and satisfied.

The old otter swam ahead upstream, keeping under the shadowy overhanging trees. The water cleaved as his body surfaced and closed over him as he dived again, the pearly bubbles of his vent following always in his wake until he emerged again.

He paddled his forepaws as he neared the bend of the river before the trout pool came into view. His movements grew more stealthy as he drew near. There would be still green shadows where the water scarcely flowed at all, so gentle was the current and so deep the pool; the trout would be poised, motionless, under the long shadows cast by the trees.

The mother otter and the lits were a good half mile down the river, following slowly, hunting as they came.

The old dog otter's nose broke surface as he reached the bend. The trout pool was now in sight, a dark green mirror held to the brooding trees.

But the joy of feeling his jaws close on the plump flesh of the quivering fish was not for the old otter today. The light wind carried to his ears a sound he knew too well. The full, melodious note of an otterhound on the scent. He had often been hunted before; the pursuit was an old game to him. The flight, underwater upstream, twisting and turning, with the hunt servants hard on his tracks before and behind him. They would be knee deep in water, swishing their long poles to prevent him doubling back to steal a quick run downstream to safety. Old as he was, the otter knew them all.

On the brink of the trout pool he paused and listened. For himself, he was not unduly afraid. He could easily escape now,

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for the hounds were still some distance away and scattered, from the sound of them. But his mate and the half grown lits were downstream. She was young and it was her first litter. She had never been hunted before. It was unlikely they would escape the pack alone.

The dog otter turned back; his sleek head made arrowing ripples along the surface of the water. He forgot the trout and gathered speed until he was outstripping the current. Round the third bend he sighted his mate. She had heard the sound of the hounds and was rounding up the young ones in alarm, guiding them to the holt where the lits had been born. This was a great mistake, for the gravel round about would show the seals of their feet and the hounds would surely pick up the scent there. The dog otter surfaced a few feet from his mate. The young ones were close on her stern, following her in alarm. She hissed softly to the old otter and received a snarl in return. She realized this was no time to linger and obediently followed him as he turned again upstream.

He swam fast, leading them to his own refuge. It was a disused holt, inaccessible to man and hound because the entrance was in very deep water, beneath a shelving bank where the current was dangerously rapid. The tunnel was longer than most otter holes and the emergency exit had been well blocked by branches of trees felled the year before, so that no dog could penetrate from land or water.

Within the tunnel, which curved like an elbow halfway, was a rising shelf of rock, broad and dry, with rifts of air coming down from the stacked timber pile over the land exit. Here the dog otter had hidden the last time the hunt combed the river for him in vain, and now he drove his mate and the two young ones down the tunnel and saw them safely grounded on the rocky shelf.

But there was room only for them. The dog otter must find himself another refuge alone. Here, if he surfaced near the entrance, the hounds would pick up the scent.

He left the tunnel. He was forced to swim upstream because the dogs and men were now strung out behind him and approaching fast. He knew his scent would reach them downstream and he must lose no time.

The hounds had found one print of the mother otter's seal in the gravel near the old holt and were on her scent. The dog otter heard the huntsman's voice as he came nearer. The light wind carried his scent downwind. With the swiftness of an eel the otter dived and headed for the deep trout pool.

The beads of his vent left a pearly trail on the surface of the water. Ahead of him, a hunt servant saw it and blew a loud blast on a horn. The otter doubled and swerved, avoiding the treading feet of the men as they waded into the river. A long pole swished across the

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otter's path and caught him a glancing blow on the nose. He swam blindly towards the opposite bank, surfaced a second for air and dived again, by a lucky chance, beneath the searching pole.

Now that he had freedom ahead and the hunt behind, he swam desperately. One hound was far ahead of the rest, swimming strongly, his hairy muzzle lifted above the surface of the water. The dog had courage; he would fight savagely if the otter turned at bay. He could inflict terrible injuries with those strong jaws, and there was death in the hound's keen eyes as he swam on the otter's stern.

The otter zig-zagged, dived and darted like a fish to shake off the dog, but failed. The dog came on. If he lacked anything in speed he made up for it in determination.

There were two things the otter could do now. His cunning brain chose between them as he swam. He could turn and face the hound at bay and dive for the dog's hairy throat before the hound could seize him. But the hound was quick, too, and he knew how terrible is the otter's bite. Besides, he was too close now, and behind him the hunt was gaining ground. The otter was tiring and he was only one against so many.

Therefore, the otter decided to make for the weir. The current there was very rapid and there was an old water millwheel beneath which ran a long, watery tunnel ending in a drain. If this drain were blocked the otter was doomed, but if it were clear, he could escape by rounding a Y-shaped bend that was often dry in summer and had an outlet some yards down river. If the hounds had passed this outlet, the otter could slip through and be away downstream whilst they were still trying to draw the drain beneath the old millwheel.

All this passed through the mind of the hunted otter as he swam, with the hound hard on his stern, through the waters of the river towards the weir.

Behind him, the huntsmen, realizing the otter's intention, tried to cut him off before he reached the weir. But the current was rapid and the otter had forged ahead through the strongest eddies. Only the hound followed closely and did not slacken speed, even when they approached the pouring waters of the weir, swimming against the current all the while.

The otter was nearly spent, but he fought his way through the churning water at the foot of the weir to the millwheel alongside. It was old, and disused and moss-grown; the drain was well below the waterline. With one last furious spurt, the otter reached the drain, dived for the vent and twisted back in agony. The hound had seized the end of his rudderlike tail in a grip like a vice and was tearing at it to hold the otter back.

Maddened by pain and terror, the otter twisted round. The dog's teeth were clenched on the long tail. In a second, the otter

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coiled his body like a snake and rose beneath the dog to fasten on the hairy throat. The dog released the tail and tried frantically to shake the otter off his throat, but the otter held on and clenched his jaws.

Blood stained the frothing water below the weir as the huntsmen came in view. The dog coughed and struggled in agony as the otter drew him down, down towards the submerged mouth of the drain and held him there.

Men shouted, more hairy heads cleaved the water as the following hounds came on. A man waded deeply into the churning water of the weir, came dangerously close to the old millwheel where the body of the dead hound swirled in the eddy like a paper boat. The man plunged a long, murderous pole into the deep water by the millwheel, trying to transfix the otter underwater.

But the otter was swimming from the distant outlet of the submerged drain, swimming away from the excited crowd of men and dogs around the weir, towards the open stream. Once safely downstream, the otter took his time and swam with the current cradling his tired little body towards the distant holt, where his mate waited with the young ones asleep beside her, and evening came softly to dream away the horror of the afternoon.

* * *

ANSWERS to A HUNTING WE WILL GO! on page 66

1. *The Snark which might be a Boojum, in Lewis Carroll's "The Hunting of the Snark."*
2. *Captain Brown on Miss Betsey Barker's cow in "Cranford" by Elizabeth Gaskell.*
3. *Helen, wife of Menelaus, who was stolen by Paris, whose story is told by Homer in his "Iliad."*
4. *The Akond of Swat in the poem of that title by Edward Lear.*
5. *The poet in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" by W. B. Yeats.*
6. *Sohrab, killed unknowingly by Rustum, his father, in the poem "Sohrab and Rustum" by Matthew Arnold.*
7. *The Ancient Mariner who shot the albatross in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.*
8. *Bonnie Lesley in Robert Burns' lyric of that name.*
9. *Sir Bedevere, having returned King Arthur's sword Excalibur to the lake, in "Morte d'Arthur" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson.*

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UNDER THE WILLOWS

For wind in the reeds and water song at night

They weren't biting, this evening, but I have brought back a wonderful sensation.

As I was holding my fishing-rod tight, a kingfisher came and settled on it.

He looked like a large blue flower at the end of a long stalk. The rod bent under his weight. I held my breath, proud that a kingfisher should have taken me for a tree.

And I am certain that he did not fly off because he was afraid, but because he thought that he was only passing from one branch to another.

JULES RENARD, *Hunting with the Fox,*
translated by T. W. Earp and G. W. Stonier

Strings By The River

Strings in the earth and air
Make music sweet;
Strings by the river where
The willows meet.

There's music along the river
For Love wanders there,
Pale flowers on his mantle,
Dark leaves on his hair . . .

JAMES JOYCE, 1882-1941

Waterways

The locks are the landmarks and milestones and strenuous obstacles of the water highway. At the locks the boatwomen draw their water, buy bread and milk; the lock-keeper comes out of his little house and, leaning over his garden fence, distributes the news of the day. On closing day the village lovers hang over the high gates and watch the boats go through, drawn by the water and the strange charm of the gipsy vessels. The old man sits above the lock and fishes. Two boats meet at a lock, and while they are waiting there are a few bold, laughing moments between the son of one and the daughter of another. They fancy each other, but the lock is filled, the girl steams out of the lock for Birmingham,

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the boy moves into the lock for London, and heaven knows when they will exchange so many words again.

Sometimes beside the lock an old inn hides among the trees, and here there will be boats tied up for the night. The men stable their horses and go into the public bar for old and mild and a noisy game of dominoes; the mothers go too, or stay in the boat with their babies; all night they sleep under the lock, where there is always the music of water, whether it be a murmurous trickle or the swollen roar of a full 'pound' cascading over the gates. And at five o'clock they rise up and travel on through many locks to sleep again to the music of a lock.

A. P. HERBERT, *The Water Gipsies*

Sea Spell

Her lute hangs shadowed in the apple-tree,
While flashing fingers weave the sweet-strung spell
Between its chords; and as the wild notes swell,
The seabird for those branches leaves the sea.
But to what sound her listening ear stoops she?
What netherworld gulf-whispers doth she hear,
In answering echoes from what planisphere,
Along the wind, along the estuary?

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI, 1828-1882

Spring Waters

He sendeth the springs into the rivers: which run among the hills.

All beasts of the field drink thereof: and the wild asses quench their thirst.

Beside them shall the fowls of the air have their habitation: and sing among the branches.

Psalm One Hundred and Four

Upstream

There is no pleasure that I have experienced like a child's midsummer holiday—the time, I mean, when two or three of us used to go away up the brook, and take our dinners with us, and come home at night, tired, happy, scratched beyond recognition, with a great nosegay, three little trout, and one napkin, the other having been used for a boat till it had gone down with all hands out of soundings. How poor our Derby days, our Greenwich dinners, our evening parties, after that!

CHARLES KINGSLEY, 1819-1875

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In Shadow

The night was very dark, a damp mist rose from the river, and the marshy grounds about, and spread itself over the dreamy fields. It was piercing cold, too; all was gloomy and black, not a word was spoken, for the driver had grown sleepy, and Sikes was in no mood for conversation. Oliver sat huddled together in a corner, bewildered with alarm and apprehension, and figuring strange objects in the gaunt trees, whose branches waved grimly to and fro, as if in some fantastic joy at the desolation of the scene.

As they passed Sunbury Church, the clock struck seven. There was a light in the ferryhouse window opposite, which streamed across the road, and threw into more sombre shadow a dark yew tree with graves beneath it. There was a dull sound of falling water not far off; and the leaves of the old tree stirred gently in the night wind. It seemed like quiet music for the repose of the dead . . .

CHARLES DICKENS, 1812-1870, *Oliver Twist*

—And In Sunlight

And all the river's way is lined
With broad reeds rustling in the wind,
And flowers that bend as if they gave
Farewells to every passing wave—
Tall meadow-sweet spreads out as stiff
As Queen Anne's pocket-handkerchief;
And amid willow-herb the sprays
Of loosestrife gold or purple blaze;
And August sees the guelder-rose
Hung with her clustered fruit that glows
Robust and crimson, where in June
Gleamed whiter than the ashen moon
The cold and delicate flowers that shine
Upon the thorny eglantine.
And far across the fields and marsh
The peewit clamours shrill and harsh,
Or—out of sight he wings so high—
The snipe falls drumming from the sky,
Or wary redshanks flit and flute
Clear notes to hush their young brood mute.

RICHARD ALDINGTON

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CHASTITY

"You can never tell about a woman," he said

by LIN YUTANG

"COME in, Meihua," shouted young Mrs. Wen to her daughter. "It's no way for a grown-up girl of your age to behave, standing around the street door."

Meihua came in, hanging her head shamefacedly. She was an extraordinarily pretty girl with gay red lips, white even teeth and a peach blossom complexion. Frank, independent and stubborn, she was the type that could be produced only in the countryside. Although she hung her head and came in, her steps were reluctant and her heart still fluttered.

"Other girls are looking," she said to her mother in self-defence, and then broke off.

A company of soldiers was marching past their street, seventy or eighty of them. The narrow street echoed with the thump of feet on the pebble pavement. Women, as well as men, had come out of their houses to watch and speculate where they were going. The older women came outside and stood against the walls. But the younger ones stayed behind the door screens of latticed split bamboo, and could see without being seen.

But Meihua had gone outside the screen and stood on the raised stone kerb outside her house, easily noticeable. The tall captain bringing up the rear, with an eye for a youthful feminine figure, had spotted her a few dozen steps away. When he passed, the young girl with the peach-coloured skin gave him a slow smile. He looked and marched on, but not without turning his head for a second look at the girl's pretty face.

His brigade had come from Suchow some thirty miles south to root out a gang of bandits who had been hiding in the blue hills and making increasingly daring raids in the neighbouring districts. In a small town like Hanchwang facilities for housing the soldiers were limited. Several temples were available, but the officers would be billeted in homes where they could at least sleep in comfortable beds.

The captain had this on his mind, and he could be excused if he turned his head to look at the girl and identify the house. Having

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provided for the soldiers, he appeared that afternoon at the girl's house and asked if he might impose on their hospitality. It was a house occupied by two widows, the girl's mother and grandmother, but he was unaware of it. He explained the situation. The campaign might last a couple of months and he would be away most of the time, but when he was in town he would appreciate it greatly if they could find a place for him to sleep. They exchanged names, and the captain found, to his surprise, that there was not a man in the house.

The girl he had seen that morning was there, excited and waiting for her mother and grandmother to say yes. The grandmother was a wrinkled woman, about sixty, wearing a black velvet band around her head. The mother, young Mrs. Wen, was tall and a little thin, still a pretty woman, somewhere around thirty five, with an unusually high well-shaped nose and a small sensitive mouth. She looked like a refined and mellowed version of the young girl, with her youthful vivacity toned down and her emotional fire subdued—but not submerged—and carefully guarded and nurtured. Her quick intelligent eyes gave the captain the impression of a mystery that was worth fathoming.

It was a slightly novel idea for this family of three generations of women to take in a strange man, but one look at the young officer made it easy for any feminine heart to entertain the idea. The captain was tall and slim, with broad shoulders, very regular features and a mass of jet-black hair. He was neither the burly, unlettered, spitting and loud-swearing, swashbuckling type one often finds in the army, nor was he prim and stiff and propped up with an artificial dignity as others were. A graduate of Peiyang Military Academy, his speech was cultured and his manners were well bred. His name was Li Sing, Sing being his personal name.

"I shan't bother you ladies for meals. All I need is a bed, a good place to wash, and now and then a cup of tea."

"This is not much of a house for you, officer," said the young Mrs. Wen. "But if you don't mind it we'll be glad for you to stay with us whenever you are in town."

The house was shabby enough and a trifle dark. They could certainly provide a bamboo couch in the front hall, and Meihua would be sleeping in the inner courtyard with her mother. The presence of the grandmother would be guarantee against any gossip.

When the two widows saw the captain their first thought was that here was a man for their Meihua who had already arrived at an age to be married or engaged. She was a striking beauty; she had many admirers, and she knew it.

But there was a superstition about the unlucky males of this Wen family. There were already two widows in the family, for

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both the grandfather and the father had died shortly after marriage. Since it had happened twice, it could happen a third time, and the man who was going to marry Meihua was practically asking for death. As they had no property except this house, people were not interested. Young men interested in Meihua were always discouraged by their parents. And so she had grown up to be a buxom girl of nineteen and was still unspoken for.

There was a great change in the house of these three women when Captain Li Sing came. He paid a great deal of attention to Meihua and enjoyed the women's company. He was courteous and respectful to the grandmother and cavalierly charming to young Mrs. Wen. He brought into the house of the widows a manly voice and ringing laughter such as they had not known for years. Certainly they hoped he would remain for ever.

His first afternoon, back from the camp, Li Sing went looking for the girl and found Mrs. Wen in the inner hall. As yet he had no idea that the widows had quite a unique history and position in their family clan and that a movement had been started by their clansmen to obtain an arch of chastity for them.

He asked where the grandmother was, though he was thinking about Meihua. "I believe she is in the back garden. Come and see it," said Mrs. Wen.

The garden was very spacious in proportion to the house. There were a few pear trees, some flowering shrubs and rows of cabbages, leeks and other vegetables. It was shut off by the walls of the neighbours' houses, but on the east a side door led to a narrow alley. By the side door there was a one-room structure that looked like a guardhouse, and beyond it was the chicken pen.

The grandmother was sitting on an old wooden chair, enjoying the afternoon sun, and Mrs. Wen, dressed neatly in black, her hair set high at the temples in the fashion of those days, walked round the garden with the captain. On her face was a curious mixture of modesty and pride which was enchanting. There was a soft glow in her eyes and a refinement in her features, showing a true appreciation of the finer things which, by a happy balance, made her as contented as she was. He was quite sure she could have married again any time she wanted to.

"Do you take care of this garden all by yourself?"

"No," replied his hostess. "Old Chang does it."

"Who is Old Chang?"

"He is our gardener. Sometimes, when we have melons and cucumbers and cabbages for sale, he markets them for money. He is the most honest man I know." Pointing to the guardhouse, she said, "He sleeps there."

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And at that moment the gardener appeared from the side door. He was bare to the waist, for it was summer, and his beautiful tanned muscles shone in the sun. He was about forty and his queue was wound round his head in peasant fashion. He had the kind of face that is distinctly likeable in whatever station it appears.

The mistress introduced Old Chang to the captain. Going to the kerbed well, he hauled up a bucket of water and, taking a gourd, drank some, pouring the remainder on his hands by way of washing them. The simplicity of it was charming to see. As he was drinking and the sun shone on his clean beautiful figure, the captain saw his hostess' sensitive lips quiver.

"I don't know what I would do without him," said Mrs. Wen. "He does not want any wages. He has nobody to support, and all he needs are his meals and a place to sleep. He says he doesn't see what he wants money for. When his mother was living, she used to stay with us and he was such a good son. Now he is completely alone and without relatives. I've never seen anyone so clean and honest and industrious. Last year I made him a jacket and had to persuade him to accept it. He does more for the family than he ever gets from us."

After lunch, when the captain went back to the garden, Old Chang was fixing the chicken pen. Li Sing offered to help. Later, he was amused to think that the chicken pen had so much to do with the future of Mrs. Wen, so significant are the little details of our life.

He got to talking with the gardener about Mrs. Wen.

"What a lady!" said Old Chang talkatively. "If it weren't for her my mother would not have had such a comfortable and happy old age. They say Imperial Tutor Wen is going to get an arch of chastity for them. Old Mrs. Wen lost her husband when she was twenty; her only son got married to my lady. It is so long ago now, but I heard how he was combing his hair one morning and just fell dead on the floor. The young Mrs. Wen became a widow at the young age of eighteen and she was expecting a child, too. But it was a girl. I have seen Meihua grow up into such a pretty young one. Captain, why don't you marry her? She will make a wonderful wife for any man able to support her."

Li Sing smiled at the gardener's simplicity of manners; he did not have to have the gardener tell him about Meihua's charms.

"What is this arch of chastity?"

"Don't you know? The Hu family has the only chastity arch in town and the Wen clansmen are a little jealous. They wrote Imperial Tutor Wen about these two widows of his own clan. The old widow has kept her widowhood already for forty years. They say the Imperial Tutor will petition the emperor to have an

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arch of chastity erected in their honour. It is very unusual to have two widows in the same house who lost their husbands so young."

"Is this true?"

"Why should I joke with you, Captain? Is this something to be joked about? They say the emperor usually grants a thousand taels of silver along with the permission for the arch. Then she will be rich and honoured. And she deserves it, too."

The captain came and went, although he was more interested in chasing after Meihua than in chasing bandits.

Meihua loved Sing as though no other girl before her had ever loved and Sing was quite captivated. The girl did not try to conceal her love and admiration for him; she told him what she admired in him and why. It might be artifice in the case of other girls the captain had known, but you just sense it when a girl is wholehearted and sincere, and the captain could not help feeling flattered.

Their love was naturally made very clear to her elders by the girl's behaviour and by the captain's more restrained but equally obvious attitude. Since Li Sing was twenty seven and single, the grandmother was already convinced that this match was predestined.

Every precaution was taken, of course, against any impropriety. The grandmother slept in the western room and Mrs. Wen and her daughter slept in the eastern room of the inner court. As soon as supper was over, the door of the inner yard was bolted and Mrs. Wen further took the precaution of bolting her own chamber door.

But the mother was deceiving herself. Li Sing sometimes stayed at the camp so that he could meet the girl outside. Meihua sometimes disappeared in the afternoon and came back late for supper. Such irregularities always coincided with the days when the captain was supposedly not in the city.

Once she came home two hours after suppertime, for it was July and the days were very long. Following a road out of town, Sing and Meihua went on a shaded path skirting a large pond which led directly to a wooded hillside. It was a glorious afternoon and the sting of the noonday sun had cooled off and there was a delightful breeze in the spruce forest where stood rocks covered with shining green moss. In the distance, beyond the pond and its green banks, lay the beautiful lake. With the captain by her side life was complete for Meihua. They had already sworn love to each other for ever. The girl told Sing how famous her mother was for her beauty in her youth, how many men had proposed to marry her, but she had refused, and, Meihua added, strangely to the captain's ears, "If I were in her place, I'd have remarried."

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"Aren't you proud of your mother?"

"Of course I am. It is that I think a woman ought to have a home with a man, not like this."

"After all," he said, "it takes a virtuous woman to do what she has done."

"What do you think a girl is for?" answered Meihua quickly and spiritedly. "To get married and have a home and have babies, isn't it? It could not have been easy for Mother to lose Father so young, especially because we are so poor. But—"

"But what?"

"I don't believe in the chastity arches."

The captain roared.

"When I grew older, I thought about it. Mother is an ambitious woman and very stern with herself. There is a sort of distinction in being a chaste widow, and I think Mother rather gloried in it. I don't know why I am talking like this."

Sing asked the girl about the arch of chastity which the clan had been expecting for her mother and grandmother.

"I am glad for Mother," said Meihua. "But after we are married we will be gone. And Grandmother's health is so frail. What will she do with a thousand taels, living all alone, with nothing to look forward to except another twenty years of lone confinement in glory, until she dies like a sainted carcass?"

Li Sing was greatly amused. How could you tell a young girl with her keen love of life that she is wrong? She had shared and watched the loveless life of the house of two widows, and perhaps she knew what she was talking about.

Suddenly realizing that the sun was setting behind the hills, she said, "Oh, Sing! I must run. I didn't know it was this late!"

During the captain's next period of absence, something happened. Mrs. Wen had heard from neighbours that the lovers had been seen together in town and once on the road leading to the wooded hillside west of the town. Nothing escaped the watchful eye of the mother. She questioned her daughter. Tearfully, the girl admitted her guilt and said the captain had promised to marry her. Mrs. Wen flew into a fearful rage.

"I never thought my own daughter would bring such disgrace to this house! Your grandmother and I have set an example to this town. Now you have sullied the name of the Wen family. How the neighbours will gloat over such a scandal when they find out! My own daughter!"

"I'm not ashamed," said Meihua, wiping her tears. "No, I'm not ashamed of loving him! I am of age to be married. If you don't like him, find me one good young man—find me one! I am

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young and will not permit myself to rot in the loveless life of this house. As for you, Mother, I don't see anything in the hollow life you call your virtuous widowhood!"

Young Mrs. Wen choked with surprise and bewilderment.

"What are you saying, girl?" she gasped, reeling before her daughter's unexpected attack.

"Yes," said the girl. "Mother, why don't you get married again? You are still young."

"May the lightning cut out your tongue!"

No one but a complete child could have hurled a truth like a bombshell in that naked, straightforward fashion. She had no idea how much she had hurt her mother, how deeply and unexpectedly her words had cut. The thought of the mother marrying again was horrible, shocking, unthinkable. "I have taught you all these years. Girl, have you no sense of shame?"

Mrs. Wen broke down completely and cried aloud pitifully. It is strange how much a sentence, a phrase, a mere word can do at times. All the torments she had endured and could tell nobody about for those long nineteen years now came out in those bitter salty tears. What had she not endured? And now her own daughter was laughing at her and taunting her years of sacrifice and self-denial, whose price she alone knew.

Not since Mrs. Wen was a little girl had she ever heard anyone question the virtue of a widow's chastity or the validity of her ideals. It was like questioning the sun. The idea of her remarrying was not really unthinkable, but truly unthought of for all those long years. It was a closed issue long ago. If she ever had any idea of remarrying she had pushed it out of her mind—until now.

Mrs. Wen ceased to scold her daughter. She had crumbled into a heap of misery. Meihua, scared, had not said another word. But the mother seemed to break completely under her daughter's taunt. What Meihua said about the emptiness of a widow's hard life was only too true. The mother buried her head in her hands upon the table and continued to weep. She let her mind drift. Meihua's happiness with the captain was real and convincing. If she had met such a young man when she was young . . .

Mrs. Wen decided that they had to wait till the captain returned to the house. He might be in the city now and the girl might go to warn him or even run away with him. She locked Meihua in her room.

When he returned three days later, Sing was greeted by Mrs. Wen alone, somewhat sullenly.

"Where's Meihua?"

"She is all right. She is inside."

"Why doesn't she come out?"

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"I was waiting for that question," answered Mrs. Wen in a grim voice, her lips tightening. "I thought you might be in the city and wondering why she didn't come to the rendezvous."

"What rendezvous?" asked Sing in surprise. "I came in only this morning."

"Don't pretend. I know all about it."

Her tone came as near a restrained feminine anger as he had ever heard from her lips. There was again that curious mixture of modesty and pride which had so charmed him.

The captain was silent. From the back of the house came Meihua's voice, crying frantically, "Let me out! Here I am, Sing! Save me, Sing! Let me out!" She broke into cries.

"What's all this?" Sing shouted, and dashed for the inside. He heard her pummelling the locked door and the pitiful crying from the inside.

Young Mrs. Wen had followed him to the inside hall, and the grandmother had also come out of her room. Walking slowly towards the captain, the old lady said with tears in her eyes, "Young man, will you marry her?"

Sing's face dropped in surprise. He understood now.

"Of course I will marry her. Now will you open the door and let me talk to her?"

The door was opened and the girl came out and fell into the arms of the officer, crying, "Take me away, Sing. Take me away!"

Now it was the mother's turn to break down and cry. The captain apologized again and again and tried to comfort her, but it seemed that her crying had nothing to do with this, a thing which the captain could not understand at the time.

He spoke as if he knew clearly where he stood. He was very sorry for what he had done, but he never had any other thought but marrying Meihua. He took all the blame on himself. He craved their pardon. But here he was, ready to marry Meihua, and he hoped to be their dutiful son-in-law. Meihua sat there, shocking her elders by her happiness.

Now that the crisis was over, the situation did not seem so bad after all. The captain's promise of marriage made it right with the family. The campaign against the bandits was soon over. Arrangements were made with the captain's family, and Meihua was rather hurriedly married to her husband at Suchow.

The human mind is one of the most unpredictable things in this universe. The short tumultuous wooing of Meihua and the captain ended in marriage. But it left a strange effect on Mrs. Wen.

Three months later the grandmother died. The captain came up alone to help with the funeral arrangements.

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Mrs. Wen informed Li Sing that the grand-uncle of the clan had come to show her a letter from the Imperial Tutor, saying that he would make the recommendation for the chastity arch. It was almost a sure thing. The story had got about and excited the clansmen considerably, and now the whole clan seemed to have a vested interest in the two widows' chastity. Among the Wen family now, the two widows, living and dead, were already referred to as *chiehfu*—Dame Chaste—a term of great honour.

Curiously, Mrs. Wen told all this to her son-in-law without much enthusiasm and at times even with a suggestion of doubt.

"Why, it is wonderful!" said Li Sing, bubbling over. "Aren't you excited?"

"I don't know. How is Meihua?"

Li Sing gave her the news that they were already expecting a child. Mrs. Wen began to tremble. "Why did you wait to tell me? That is real news!"

"Oh, it is hardly as important as the honour of the arch to you, Mother," said the captain.

"The arch!" Mrs. Wen exclaimed contemptuously. "Let us not talk about it!"

Li Sing was surprised at her indifference to such a rare honour. He recalled what his wife had said about another twenty years of "lone confinement in glory." It was hard to believe that she herself would look at it that way.

"Do you think I should accept it?" Mrs. Wen asked, abruptly returning to the topic. What a strange question.

"It would be foolish not to . . ." Li Sing's voice trailed off, as a doubt entered his mind. "Of course, after the arch is granted, your widowhood would be sacred, as it were, in the emperor's keeping."

When the funeral was over Mrs. Wen came back to her house alone. The front and back halls were still covered with hangings of scrolls of condolence and stretching across the centre of the hall was a white silk scroll, the present of the magistrate himself, with the four characters, "One door, two chaste."

Living alone in that house, Mrs. Wen had plenty of time for thought of her future. As she looked ahead, she was a little frightened. Only a few months ago her mother-in-law, her daughter and the captain had filled this house with gay laughter. Too many things had happened one after another—Meihua's romance and marriage, the grandmother's death, this sudden rise to a glorious but rather dreary height of fame, and the unborn child.

Old Chang had been wonderful throughout the funeral ceremony, and now, seeing his mistress so sad, he came to be an even better help. He did the shopping in Meihua's place, he relieved her of

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all household worries and of all things that had to do with the outside world, and was able even to bring home some income from the sale of the vegetables. From her kitchen she watched the faithful, honest gardener at work, and sometimes in sheer loneliness went out to the garden to talk with him. The garden was completely shut off, and no neighbours could see them. A sort of intimacy developed.

The grand-uncle called, bringing a hundred taels as a funeral gift from the Imperial Tutor. The granting of the monument and the thousand taels was a practical certainty.

When the grand-uncle left Mrs. Wen had a difficult decision to make. Old Chang congratulated her with all his heart. He was proud of his mistress and had never had any idea but that she would soon be a famous woman.

Several times Mrs. Wen wanted to open the question. But how was a lady, and a chaste widow at that, to propose to a man? Several times she went to the garden to discuss vegetables with him. But there were the blue sky and the white sun above, and her modesty and her long years of training prevented her from ever mentioning what was on her mind. She just could not do it. Chang was so absolutely honest, so completely faithful. He just never thought of her as a woman.

When a baby girl had been born to Meihua and the captain, they came to show Mrs. Wen the new grandchild. She was thrilled to hold the pretty little baby, plump and white and warm, close to her breast and croon to her.

"Meihua, I am so glad you are so happily married. You must be very proud of your child and your husband."

There were tears in Meihua's eyes. She thought her mother had become more human and had completely, truly forgiven her. But during the first day of their visit Meihua saw her mother sitting silently alone and caught a worried expression on her face. She was no longer the self-possessed, contented woman Meihua had always known her to be.

Then the captain learned the astounding news. Coming to the garden, the captain saw Old Chang tilling the ground. To his great surprise the gardener pulled him to his sleeping quarters. On the gardener's face shone a strange light of happiness, excitement and perplexity.

"Please tell me what to do, Captain. I am an uneducated man."

"What is it?"

Old Chang hesitated a second.

"It's my lady," he said.

"Is my mother-in-law in any trouble?"

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"No. But, Captain, you alone can give me advice. I don't know what to do."

"You must tell me what the trouble is. What happened between you two when I went away?"

The gardener was slow of speech, unused to fine conversation. As he told the story, the captain could not believe his ears. Old Chang went on slowly and solemnly and then the captain understood how the highly correct widow that his mother-in-law was had gone about her problem in the most devious way, to achieve something which a young girl like Meihua could do with a simple gesture or kiss.

The summer nights had been hot and Old Chang slept half-clothed on his mat. One night the week before, he woke up to hear his lady calling, "Old Chang." The declining moon was in the western sky, shining directly over his bed, and he saw his lady standing at the door. Hastily he got up and asked whether there was anything she wanted.

"No," said Mrs. Wen. "You are indeed a heavy sleeper. I heard the chickens cackling and thought a mountain cat was stealing them."

In order to reach the chicken pen she had to pass Old Chang's sleeping quarters. It must have been three o'clock in the morning. The grass was wet with dew.

"Go back to bed," the widow said. "You may catch cold standing there without a jacket on." But Old Chang insisted on seeing her to the kitchen door.

Old Chang thought of the little wildcats that came from the mountains to prey on the poultry at night. But he never seemed to hear the chicken cries. He always slept soundly.

The next day Mrs. Wen said to him, "Close the pen well and see that nothing can get in there."

"Don't worry," he said.

This had never happened before, but on the third night a wildcat really messed up the wire and got away with a black hen. Old Chang awakened when he felt someone covering him with a sheet and his lady was shaking him.

"What is the matter?" he asked as he sat up.

"I saw a wildcat. He jumped over the wall and got away."

Old Chang hastily threw on a jacket and they examined the pen and found a big hole in the mesh. His lady pointed out to him where she had seen the wildcat. They did not see any footprints, but when they came to the spot they found, indeed, the black hen dead on the flowerbed along the wall, with a gory gash in its neck. Old Chang apologized for his carelessness, but the widow was kindness itself and said to him, "We have lost nothing.

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I can cook the chicken for supper tomorrow."

"How is it that you are such a light sleeper?" Old Chang asked.

"Oh, I often lie awake at night. I can hear the slightest noise even in my sleep," replied Mrs. Wen.

They went back to his room, but his lady remained at the door. He saw spots of blood on his lady's dress and fingertips. Throwing the dead hen to the floor, he poured some water for her to wash her hands. He asked her if she would like to have a cup of tea. She declined at first, but on second thoughts said she would; she was fully awake now and was not likely to go to sleep again.

"Shall I bring it to the house?" Old Chang asked.

"No," she said. "It is so beautiful out here."

"I won't be a minute."

"No hurry," said Mrs. Wen.

She sat on his bed and felt the mat and the bare boards and the ragged sheets he had for a coverlet and said to him, "Old Chang, I didn't know that you haven't a decent coverlet. I'll give you one tomorrow." Oh, what a lady!

The next day, when the bowl of chicken was served at supper, his lady reminded him again of the mountain cat. "Have you repaired the pen?"

He said that he had, of course.

"The same one may come tonight," she said.

"How do you know?"

"Why, he didn't get what he wanted last night. He was too timid. He almost got the chicken, but dropped it when he got scared. He wants the chicken and he knows where the chicken is. Then, if he is a sensible cat, he ought to come tonight. Isn't it clear?"

"So I was determined," continued the gardener with his story, "to sit and watch for the cat, and told my lady not to bother. I turned the lamp low and brought out a stool behind the bush, with a heavy briar stick to cudgel the brains out of any mountain cat that dared show its paws in my garden. And the moon climbed to the zenith and there was still no cat, and climbed down again and there was still no cat.

"It was getting chilly, and I decided to turn in, when I heard my lady's voice calling softly, 'Old Chang!'

"I turned and saw my lady in white approaching from the house like Fairy Maku. When she came close to me she whispered to me, 'Have you seen anything?'

"'Not a thing,' I replied.

"'Let's wait in your room,' she said to me.

"It was the most beautiful night I ever had in my life. We

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two sitting there, me and my lady, when all the world was asleep and silent around us. She had given me this new bed sheet that morning. It was so white and new I had not the heart to sit on it and crumple it. Huddled there, we looked at the silvery moonbeams coming through the window. It was as if we had known each other for a long, long time.

"We sat and talked, or rather my lady was talking most of the time, of all sorts of things—of the garden, of life and toil and sorrow and happiness of heart. She asked me about my past and how it was I had not married. I told her I could not afford it."

"If you could afford it, would you get married?" Mrs. Wen asked him.

"Of course I would," Old Chang replied.

The widow looked rapt and sort of dreamy and seemed unreal to the gardener, with the moonlight falling upon her pale face and her eyes bright like gems. Old Chang was almost frightened.

"Are you real or are you Fairy Maku coming out in a white dress in the harvest moon?" he asked.

"Old Chang, don't be silly! Of course I am real."

When she said that, she seemed more unreal to him and her eyes were looking at him and yet not looking at him. The gardener could not help looking at her.

"Don't look at me like that. Of course I am a woman. Touch me."

She held out her arm. Old Chang touched it, and Mrs. Wen shivered.

"I am very sorry. Have I frightened you?" asked the gardener, feeling apologetic. "For a moment I thought you were truly Fairy Maku coming out on a moonlight night like this."

The widow chuckled and Old Chang felt relieved.

"Am I really as beautiful as that, Chang?" she said. "I wish it would always remain like this. Tell me, do you think that Fairy Maku would love and marry as men and women do on earth?"

"How do I know?" replied the honest Chang, still failing to catch the hint. "I have never met Fairy Maku."

Then Mrs. Wen asked a question which bewildered the gardener. "What would you do if you met her tonight? Would you make love to her? Would you prefer that I am Fairy Maku or that I am a woman?"

"Lady, you are joking. How dare I?"

"I am serious. Would you be happy if we lived always like this—like Meihua and the captain—as man and wife?"

"Lady, I don't believe you. I haven't the luck. What about the arch of chastity?"

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"Never mind the arch of chastity. I want you. We can be happy together and live together till great old age. I don't care what the people say. I have had twenty years of widowhood and that is enough for me." And she kissed him.

"Captain, what am I to do?" Old Chang cried in the same breath that he finished the story. "Who am I to stand in the emperor's way? But my lady says it is all right. She asked me to marry her now or she would never be able to marry later on. Imagine my lady saying that! She said she would be happy with me, and I could support her as we are now. Captain, what am I to do?"

The final idea penetrated Li Sing's head very slowly, for he was bewildered at first and was intent on catching every syllable and nuance of the gardener's words. It was after some hard swallowing that he exclaimed, "What to do? You idiot! Marry her!"

He carried the news in a flash to Meihua. "I am so glad for Mother," said Meihua. And then she added in a whisper to her husband, "Mother must have killed the black hen herself! There ought to be an arch of chastity for men like Chang."

Late that evening, after supper, the captain said to Mrs. Wen, "Mother, I have been thinking. This baby girl of mine has been a great disappointment to you, I am sure. We do not know when we shall have a baby boy who could bear the name of Wen."

Mrs. Wen looked up. The captain continued solemnly, looking steadily at the ground, "I have been thinking. You must not laugh at me, Mother. Grandmother is dead and you are lonely living all alone. Chang is an honest man. If you will permit me to speak to him, I think he will be glad to adopt the Wen family name when he marries you."

Mrs. Wen blushed all over. She began to say, "Yes, the Wen family name . . ." and dashed into her room.

When her wedding to the gardener took place, it was a cruel disappointment to the Wen clansmen.

"You can never tell about a woman," the grand-uncle said.

* * *

CUCKOO!

Cuckoos lead Bohemian lives,
They fail as husbands and as wives,
Therefore they cynically disparage
Everybody else's marriage.

OGDEN NASH

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COFFEE FOR ONE

I can see the irony of the situation, but can you?

by SIDNEY CARROLL

I SAT in the parlour and waited until my wife was deeply and firmly in bed. I waited until I could hear the sound of her snoring, so rhythmic, so blissful. Silently I counted to ten, as I always do when my heart is pounding. Then I went into the kitchen.

There was no need for silence then. Once my wife was asleep nothing in the world could awaken her—except perhaps the aroma of good food. From my vest pocket I took four little packets containing a powder and placed them side by side on the kitchen table. From another vest pocket I extracted the piece of paper on which I had copied my instructions.

Then I sat there, my head slightly to one side, my chin cupped in my free hand. That is my concentrating pose; I always fall into it when I concentrate. It *is* a kittenish pose for a small man, I admit, but I can't help it. For the hundredth time I read the words I had copied from that old book in the library: *This essence, impervious to heat, Sun or Moon, ravage of Life or passage of Time, can be devised if the steps hereunto appended are followed with a Physician's care . . .*

That part I knew by heart, as indeed I knew most of what followed. But I am a careful man, so for the hundredth time I read again every word on the paper, every step of the way. *Utterly clean Vials and Crystals are the first necessity*, it said.

Then I, who had gone over the motions a thousand times, went to work with my fingers.

I arranged bottles and glasses and two spoons on the table. I took out of the cupboard three test tubes I had hidden there the week before. I cleaned all of these under scalding tap water, rinsing them again and again. When I had finished cleaning those bottles and glasses I held them under the naked light bulb, and they dazzled my eye.

Following the instructions, I next emptied my packets of white powder into some new saucepans I had had hidden for weeks. I mixed a liquid from the powders and put it on the stove to cook. I let the juices simmer and cook, and then I poured them one into the other over and over again.

I have steady and skilful hands. Only my eyelids blinked

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needlessly, and a tear would shimmer in the corner of my left eye from time to time. An occupational disease. I dispose of these tears easily enough. I flick my head sharply ; the tear is torn from the eye and hurries to the floor. I hummed my little song and I had certain little thoughts while I worked.

I was thinking of the time I had poisoned the pigeons. Why had I never been caught ? Of course I had the answer. I had never been caught because they could never guess where I would strike next.

I had spread my corn in a square in a northern suburb on a Monday morning. And on Monday evening there were pictures in the paper of scores of dead pigeons, like bodies on a beach on August Bank Holiday. On Tuesday morning I had scattered peanuts in front of the library on the south side of the town, and that evening there were more pictures of dead pigeons. And so on.

And what could the police do ? The police ? Mere infantrymen, I call them. How can the infantry know where the general is going to strike next ? I had deployed, thrust, parried, tantalized them. How can the police capture such an enemy ? When you leave tracks going in one direction, they can follow you. But when a footprint falls here today and six miles away tomorrow—and on the third day the third footprint falls behind your back—how can you follow ? That was my theory, and that was why they hadn't caught me the time I'd had fun poisoning the pigeons.

Such were my thoughts while I mixed my powders and bitumens in the small, nakedly lit kitchen, with the curtains tightly drawn, and the sounds of my wife's snoring coming from the bedroom.

Then I finished. All of the priceless lymph was contained in one test tube, at last. I held it up to the light. The liquid in the tube shone crystal clear under the bulb. I smiled. I knew then I had kept faith with the little book in the library. I had made no mistakes. . . . *one, only one slight deviation from the Formula and the Liquid will turn a darkish hue. The final Liquid must be clear as fresh Water* . . .

My hand did not tremble, though my poor heart was racing. I had it ! I stoppered the tube tightly and hastily began to clean up the kitchen. In five minutes the job was done, for I am an old hand at the routine. Thirty three years of cleaning the kitchen of my wife's left-overs has made me an expert. I wiped my hands till they were bone dry.

Now I read my secret paper once more : *Nothing on earth can blunt its Sting. Nothing can rend its Heart, nothing can still its corruptive pulse, not Fire, not Water, not Air, not Earth. It is unconquerable. Burn it, it will glow. Drown it, it will drink. Bury it, it will grow. When it touches, doom ! Skin will rot before its Stain dissolves.*

I presented myself with one of my rare little jokes. Reads like

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an advertisement for varnish, I said, and I couldn't resist chuckling. I can always see the irony in things. Sly, that's Mr. Peters.

And now I came to the vital part of the evening's fun.

Mrs. Peters and I use a pint and a half of milk each day. Now, at night, the two clean, empty bottles stood side by side on the sink. I regarded them, hesitating for a moment.

The big bottle ? The half pint bottle ? Both ?

I thought about it, and I shrugged. What difference did it make, really ? I picked up the pint bottle. Then I poured into it one drop of my liquid—exactly one drop, like a teardrop. I swirled it round a bit, watched the drop run in circles at the bottom of the milk bottle until it spread and flattened and exhausted itself. " It's alive," I warned myself.

I put the two bottles in the passage just outside our door, the usual place where the milkman would find them in the morning.

Two days later it happened. Down in a street south of the river. A family of five—father, mother, three children—poisoned. I read about it in the morning paper. Then I folded the paper ever so neatly and allowed myself the first chuckle of the day. My word, this was going to be so easy ! Like poisoning pigeons.

That night, when the snores from the bedroom started up again, I went into the kitchen, took the day's empty milk bottle and poured one drop of the clear liquid into it. The old, wise little book in the library had told me that nothing could kill this incredible thing. And the little book had not lied. Apparently nothing could kill it—not heat nor light nor fire nor water . . . nor pasteurization. It would annihilate any antidote. I put the milk bottle outside the door.

In two days I had results. It was in the papers again. A man in the Burbank district this time, a manufacturer of flowers for ladies' hats. Same situation. Found at the breakfast table. Poisoned. He was slumped over, his face in a bowl of cereal, stone-cold dead.

That night I felt—well, restless. Like a spendthrift with a bulging wallet, I was in need of some sort of wild indulgence. I indulged by pouring *two* drops of liquid into the milk bottle that night. Somehow, the extra drop gave me just the lift I needed.

The next day it was an elderly couple in the north suburbs who got it. They were found dead over their coffee cups. The papers didn't say so, and obviously the police wouldn't, but I knew the one vital fact—that elderly couple had used milk in their coffee.

I had but one twinge of remorse. I knew in my heart that I wasn't going to keep this up for ever. I could, you know, if I'd felt like it. But fun's fun and business is business. I had to keep the business in mind. It was getting time for me to close in. So I did it only once more, just for fun.

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The clear drop falls into the milk bottle; the milk bottle is placed outside the door; the milkman picks it up in the morning. He takes it to the dairy and he drops it into the chute along with hundreds of other bottles, and all the bottles are boiled and cleansed and pasteurized and come out clear and clean as fresh air. All but one. That one has a forgotten fluid in it that cannot be destroyed by fire or light or water. And the day after that, two children who live in the heart of town die at the breakfast table.

Simple? Sly?

Perhaps others before me had toyed with the idea of a willy-nilly sort of slaughter, hitting here and there at random to confuse the police—then winding up with the one truly intended victim, so that the police would think the real victim just another person struck down on a willy-nilly sort of basis. Perhaps others before me had used that idea, I had to admit. But one inspiration was mine alone. None before me had ever discovered the really perfect weapon for such a campaign.

It was my own inspiration to use the milk bottle—that life-giving symbol which enters the homes of rich and poor, all over the town, north and south of the river, and in the suburbs. Can you, dear heart, think of a lethal weapon with a more democratic soul?

So far, the trail of my indiscriminate slaughter was exactly to my taste. In succession, the deaths had occurred once in the centre of the town, once south of the river, once in Burbank and once in the north suburb. A far and roundabout trail! On the police station maps, the men in blue were undoubtedly putting pins into a map of the city, endeavouring to make some kind of pattern out of the design of these killings. Let them go on looking for patterns! Let them go on breaking their heads questioning the neighbours for miles around about motives, seeking out purported enemies of the deceased and wondering who could possibly be doing this thing? Let them look. Sly Mr. Peters had a design far beyond the little patterns that pins can make on a map. My design was in my head.

I drew the final stroke on the sixteenth of December, two weeks after I had commenced the campaign and plunged the city into a state of panic.

On the night of the fifteenth I sat down to dinner with Mrs. Peters.

As usual, I did the serving. Mrs. Peters' contribution to meals always ended with the cooking. From then on the effort was mine. I served the soup and the fish and the hot custard. She read the evening paper all through the meal. As she finished each course, she pushed the empty plate under the newspaper towards me. When she was through with the paper, she let it drop to the floor.

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"Well?" she asked, spooning the custard into her mouth with quick strokes.

"Well, *what*, my dear?"

"What happened today?"

"Oh, the usual. Nothing exciting. Mrs. Canfield in the reference room thinks she has appendicitis."

"What else?" she asked.

"Nothing."

Mrs. Peters leaned back in her chair. "Mrs. Canfield, Mrs. Canfield! All I hear about lately is this Mrs. Canfield. I've got her up to here." She drew one finger across her throat. Then she smiled. "How old is this Mrs. Canfield?"

The leer in her voice was unmistakable, the unpleasant imputation. I could hardly speak for the choking sensation in my throat. But I did get words out, finally.

"Mrs. Canfield is, I should judge, about seventy years old. She is a grandmother several times over."

My little voice—I admit it *is* a little voice—was almost boyish now, because of the choking I could not prevent. But how could she know that the choking was my hatred for her? She was never aware of my more obvious emotions; she was sensitive only to the substrata of my thoughts. Uncanny she was, that way. Thinking back on it, I believe this was what I resented most about her.

She went on. "So? They're never too old for you, are they, Bunny? I've seen the looks you give some grandmothers I know."

She pushed herself back from the table. I found it hard to camouflage my disgust at her table manners. I thought—And in her youth she was so graceful.

"Coffee," said Mrs. Peters. She put two fingers to her lips and her cheeks puffed out.

"Right away."

I got up and went into the kitchen.

I have recorded that dinner conversation to give you some notion of what strength of will it took not to kill her that night. You'll agree she deserved it, won't you? Well, you are more impetuous than I. I am a careful man, and so I did not kill her that night. I brought her the coffee, fresh and steaming and undefiled. She drank it and liked it and was at peace with the evening paper again. I did not kill her that night. I held my breath.

It was not until the following morning that I did it. As on every other morning, I took my early breakfast alone. Then, as usual, I prepared the makings of breakfast for Mrs. Peters—the porridge ready in the oven, the bread sliced for toasting, the spoonful of marmalade in the blue pot. I filled the coffee saucepan and placed it

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on the stove. When she awoke at her usual hour and came shuffling into the kitchen, all there was for her to do was to turn up the gas—the sum total of her morning chores.

But that morning I added one extra touch. Carefully, carefully, I removed the cap from the milk bottle, dropped into the milk three clear drops from the test tube and neatly replaced the bottle cap. Mrs. Peters, you see, always put cold milk on her porridge. Good for her digestion, she always claimed. I suppose it was.

A few minutes later, at eight forty five a.m., I quietly left the flat to catch the bus that took me to work.

Shortly after noon, I came back to the flat as usual for lunch. I returned as always with a shopping basket of groceries under my arm. Any attentive neighbour could notice that I was living up to my routine in every way. I walked the three flights up the stairs, put the key in the lock, opened the door, entered the flat—and saw her. I closed the door carefully before I took a good look at the heap beside the table. She must have grabbed the tablecloth as she fell. It covered her like a shroud, up to the neck. Pieces of crockery were all over the floor.

I dropped my bundles on the floor as if I had let them go from the shock of it. In the kitchen I got the test tubes and saucepans, the powders and liquid from the top shelf. I emptied the liquid down the sink. I remember thinking that it would kill many fish before it would dissolve into the unconquerable ocean. Then I dropped the saucepans and test tubes and powders down the incinerator chute. After that I walked seven steps to the telephone and dialled the operator. When the flat feminine voice answered, I said as politely as I could, "I want a policeman."

They came and performed their duties. They examined everything, asked many questions, kept the neighbours at bay, took photographs, measured things, and in a final burst of efficiency, carried the body of my poor wife away. I sat in one corner of the sofa with a handkerchief to my nose, in a catalepsy of grief and bewilderment. To the endless questions I merely nodded answers. Obviously, I was in no condition to be interrogated. Two of the detectives looked at each other and shook their heads in sympathetic vibration. "Better let the old fellow alone," they seemed to nod to each other. "This must be a terrible shock to him."

There was one detective, name of Delaney, who finally came over and sat next to me on the sofa. He put one hand on my shoulder.

"Look, Mr. Peters," he told me. "This is no time to go into details. That I know. We'll get out of here now and leave you alone. But first I want to explain one thing. You've been reading the papers. You know we've got a maniac loose somewhere, who is poisoning people all over the city. We don't know why—we don't know what

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he's up to. All we know is he poisons 'em and he doesn't care where he does it. He did it here today. He's liable to do it in the north tomorrow or in the east or over the river perhaps. We don't know. We have no defence against this kind of thing. Not yet, anyway."

I did not look up as I removed the handkerchief from my mouth. "But how," I whispered, "how did he get in? My poor wife—"

"Look now," said Delaney, "listen to me carefully. Perhaps I can make you understand a thing or two. The man is crazy. He's got a grudge against some of the citizens perhaps, but we don't know why—yet. Against somebody with a system, we can fight. Against a man who just kills anywhere, any time, just for the sake of killing, where do we stand? We never know where he's going to hit next, because—well, you see, this fellow, whoever he is, he's thought up the damnedest murder weapon you ever heard of in your whole life! What I mean is . . ."

And then, quietly, confidentially, because he said it was my right as the bereaved to know the true facts, he told me about the milk bottles.

I looked up at him full in the face for the first time.

Imagine that! A killer who always uses milk as a conveyor of the poison he administers! As Mr. Delaney described the monstrous thing, my eyes opened wider and wider.

"You understand what I'm telling you?" he asked.

"I—I think so."

"You understand it's strictly top secret?"

"Yes. Of course I do."

"Please—keep it under your hat. It's tough it had to be your wife this time, Mr. Peters. Out of all the available people, he had to pick your wife for today. Well—that's life. We'll be going now."

Mr. Delaney patted me softly on the shoulder, stood up, looked down at me with pity in his innocent blue eyes and jerked a thumb at his assistants to indicate that it was time to go. As they left the flat they heard one last whimper from me, in my infinite grief. Then they left me to the consolation of solitude.

So there it is, dear friends and gentle hearts. There it is. Seems there's a poisoner loose somewhere in the city, and he strikes willy-nilly, like lightning. He must be mad. Otherwise, why would he kill so many different people in so many different places—and especially people who have nothing at all to do with one another? It makes no sense. The police haven't found even a single clue to his possible identity yet. Well then, citizens, there's only one thing to do until they find out. Lock your doors. And don't forget to bar your windows, for who says madmen and lightning always use the front door?

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My neighbours say it's all the fault of the stupid police. So busy with parking offences and loud advice when a man simply trips on the small regulations. But are they ever any good when it comes to a real emergency like this one?

That's what the neighbours say. You know my own feelings in the matter. I agree entirely. But in all fairness, the police are not entirely to blame. They can't tell everything they know. They can't possibly explain to the public that business about the poison always being in milk, can they? Just picture to yourself what a panic that would cause. No telling where that would lead to. I think the police are perfectly justified in letting a few people die every day until they can track down the fiend, and *then* explain how he did it. The police are closing in, for they *have* found how he does it. That's why the police have asked me, on my word of honour, not to say a word about the milk.

Of course I won't. Not I. I know how to keep a secret. I really do. I've kept the secret of my little book, haven't I? I haven't told a soul about that and the wonderful formula it contains.

Formula, did I say? Let me tell *you* a secret. My little book contains more than one formula. It contains more than a dozen. It contains more than a hundred. There is one, for example, on page thirty seven, that tells how to make gold out of garbage. A simple process, although it involves several hours of work. Then there is a perfume to prepare on page ninety six. If a man anoints himself with a drop of it once a month, he becomes irresistible to every female within an area of thirty square miles.

I propose to make the gold first, then the perfume.

I propose to have a great deal of fun.

* * *

THE FACE IS FAMILIAR

Mr. Winston Churchill was making a journey by rail. Opposite him in the carriage sat a man about his own age, who, Mr. Churchill noticed, kept glancing at him. After half an hour, the man spoke. "I say," he said, "is your name Churchill?"

"It is," Mr. Churchill replied.

After another half hour's silence, the man spoke again. "I hope you don't mind my asking," he said, "but is your Christian name Winston?"

"Yes," said Mr. Churchill.

There was another half hour's silence, during which the man nervously fingered his old school tie. At last he spoke again. "I say," he said, "did you, by any chance, happen to go to Harrow?"

From *The Forum*

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STREET OF DISGUISES

A tale of Old Baghdad

by C. G. CAMPBELL

IT is said that in the days of Haroun er Rashid there was a youth named Jamil, and he was the son of a cloth merchant in the bazaar of Baghdad the City of Peace, and only upon God is there belief.

Now, there came a year in which the father of Jamil died, and he was one of the richest merchants in the City of Peace. And Jamil inherited from his father his shop, and the cloths and silks in the shop, and a chest containing gold of such weight that it took twenty men to lift it.

Jamil mourned for his father for many months, and he took his body and buried it in Holy Nejaf, and he returned to Baghdad and sat in the shop to conduct business in place of his father. And in the evenings he used to take a boat, and visit the islands and eat of roast fish and drink arak.

One evening he was passing in his boat when he looked up at the window of a house which stood in a garden close to the river and he saw in the window a girl. He looked at the girl and was amazed, for her skin was of the texture of the petals of lilies, though tinged with the colour of roses. And her eyes were like the gazelle. And her breasts were rounded firmly in that shape which is truly the zenith of perfection, and her waist was as slim as a boy's waist. And Jamil thought: I have no desire and no ambition in life other than that I may love this girl.

So Jamil returned to his house, and he did not go to the islands. And he found a discreet woman who was not accustomed to gossip at the well, and from whom death or torture would not drag a secret. And he said to the sage woman: "Go to the street of So-and-So, then go to the house which stands in the garden of pomegranate trees, then speak with the woman servants, and find out from them everything concerning the moon-faced girl who lives in that house, and bring me all information concerning her situation."

In the morning the woman returned from that place and she said: "The name of the moon-faced girl is Amira, and she is the daughter of a poor man, a barber, a Persian from Shiraz, and he brought her here as a child—ah, these long journeys are terrible. I remember when my father brought me here . . ."

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But Jamil did not listen to the words of the wise woman, for his mind was on other things and he said: "Is Amira then married?" And the wise woman replied: "She is a virgin." And Jamil asked: "Has she a cousin or is there anyone with the right to marry her?" And the woman answered: "There are obstacles to the marriage of this girl. Let it not be hidden from you that she came here a poor girl, then her father died, but she inherited no money from him, yet now she is exceedingly rich and her riches exceed your riches." And Jamil was amazed and he said: "You said she was a virgin. From where, then, are these riches?"

And the wise woman answered: "I said she is a virgin, and it is by discreet and careful enquiries that I am sure of this, for her maidservants and slaves swear even by their eyes that no man has ever even touched her hand. Yet her riches are from her beauty, for her beauty exceeds the beauty of any girl in the City of Peace, and, know you, the rich and those of noble blood will pay even bags of gold to see her, for those of great and royal families love artistic and beautiful things. And this girl will show you her face for fifty dirhems, and her body from the waist upwards clothed in the most beautiful silks for one hundred dirhems, and her whole body clothed in the rarest embroidery of Isfahan for two hundred dirhems, and her body from the waist upwards unclothed for five hundred dirhems, and her whole body in all its perfection and in every detail for one thousand dirhems, payable in advance. But between you and that girl will be a grid of iron bars as thick as a man's arm, nor can you approach her, and from this position and from this situation and in no other way can you see this girl." And Jamil the Merchant heard and was astonished.

And throughout the night sleep did not come to Jamil the Merchant. He lay on his bed and he thought and considered: How can a way be opened that I may take this girl and marry her, and yet it be unknown to the merchants and to my companions that I have married a girl who has exposed her face to the lustful gaze of desire? But no way appeared open before him.

And in the morning his desire to see his beloved was strong in him and it overcame him, so he rose from his bed and he went to the bazaar and he went to the shop of one who was skilled in disguises, for he thought: If I am to marry this girl she will be ashamed before me if I know of her profession. And he put on the clothes of a Turkish secretary, and he fastened to his face a beard made of sheep's wool and when he went out from that place his friends knew him not.

He went to the house which stood in the garden of pomegranate trees and he knocked on the door of the courtyard. And the door

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was opened by a eunuch of enormous size, armed with a sword. And behind him stood ten more eunuchs, men of great size, armed with swords. And an old woman came out and stood before him.

And Jamil the Merchant said to the woman: "I wish to see your mistress, the Lady Amira." And the woman replied: "In what manner do you wish to see my mistress? Do you wish to see her face, or her body from the waist upwards clothed in the richest silks, or her whole body clothed in the rarest cloth of Isfahan, or in what manner do you wish to see my mistress?"

And Jamil the Merchant replied: "I do not want to gaze on your mistress in this manner. I wish only to converse with her on affairs of importance beyond your comprehension." And the woman answered: "It is neither permitted nor allowed." And she made a sign to the eunuchs, who advanced upon Jamil the Merchant. And Jamil the Merchant said: "Take, then, fifty dirhems; I will see the lady's face."

So the woman took the money and she unlocked a door in the wall and she took Jamil the Merchant up a narrow staircase, guarded by eunuchs armed with swords, and she left him in a small chamber which had in one wall an opening guarded by a grid of bars of iron as thick as a man's arm. And through this opening he could see a room furnished in the richest manner. And the woman warned him as she left: "Have no speech with my mistress, or a shutter will fall and she will vanish from your sight."

And Jamil the Merchant waited in that chamber, and his heart was beating fast and loud. Then a door opened and behind the iron bars appeared the face of the Lady Amira, his beloved. And Jamil the Merchant saw and was astonished. For he saw that her ears were like the petals of a flower, and her forehead was the colour of milk, and her cheeks were like ripe peaches, her lips were the acme of desire, and as for her eyes, when he looked into them he lost the power of thought.

In this manner Jamil the Merchant gazed on the face of his beloved. There was no power of reason in him and he spoke and said: "O my lady, I am sent to you by my master, a wealthy merchant of Stambul, and he desires to marry you, and he will give you a chest of gold, and rich cloth, and anything in the world that you desire if you will leave Baghdad and go to that place and wed him." But the Lady Amira made a sign and an iron shutter fell behind the iron bars and he was cut off from her sight.

And the heart of Jamil the Merchant was heavy with grief. And he returned to his shop, but he did no trade, for all sense had left his brain.

And the next day and the following day and on every day he went to the house which stood in the garden of pomegranate trees

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and on every day he gave the woman a thousand dirhems that he could gaze on his beloved in all her beauty. And each time he tried to speak to his beloved the shutter would fall and he would be cut off from her sight. And in this manner six months passed, and Jamil the Merchant was ruined, and his shop was empty.

And when his money was finished Jamil the Merchant dressed in the guise of the Turkish secretary and he went to the house that stood in the garden of pomegranate trees and he said to the woman: "Many hundreds of times I have visited this house, and the money given me by my master the Ottoman Pasha is finished, yet I have not executed his orders. Let me out of mercy and compassion see your mistress, that I may conclude my business."

But the woman made a sign to the eunuchs, and they advanced on Jamil the Merchant and they seized him and they threw him out of the courtyard into the dust of the road and they beat him with whips and with sticks and he lay in the road in a bleeding and miserable state.

And the woman servant came to him and spoke in this manner: "Go from here, O dog of the Ottomans, and remain far from us, for my mistress is revenged on you as she will be revenged on the whole tribe of Adam. For, know you, my mistress is of royal blood and her father was a king in Fars, but through the treachery of his ministers and his soldiers his kingdom was overthrown and he had to fly from the land. But the Queen, the mother of my mistress, a lady of unsurpassed beauty, was caught by the treacherous Wazir, and he did to her things which it is not permitted to mention, and finally he killed her in an atrocious manner, and when my mistress became aware of these facts she resolved to employ her beauty, her only weapon, to ruin men, for in men she saw only evil and treachery, while goodness and virtue are reserved for women."

And Jamil the Merchant heard the words of the woman servant and he rose from the ground and he returned to his shop and his heart was heavy with grief. And he sat in his empty shop weeping.

Now, it happened that on that very day Abu Nawas, friend and companion of the Commander of the Faithful, was passing through the market in disguise, thinking to find some play or jest which might amuse his master and divert his thoughts from the cares of state and which might make him happy. And as he was passing the shops of the great merchants laden with the silks and rich stuffs and embroideries of Damascus and of China he saw a shop which was empty of cloth or goods, and in it was seated a youth of great beauty who was weeping in a manner which tore the heart.

And Abu Nawas went up to the youth and he saluted him and said: "Hé! Hé! O boy, what is it that you sell? Is it the air, for I see you have no other goods with you?" And Jamil the

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Merchant answered him and said: "Depart from me, O my master, as from one afflicted by the plague, for there is no power or reason in me, and I see nothing before my eyes but the face of a girl, nor can I engage in any trade or occupation. It is only the Angel of Death who can bring release from this torture."

But Abu Nawas seated himself in that shop and he plied the youth with questions until he had related all those facts and those events which are known to you, my listeners, nor was a single word omitted from the account. And Abu Nawas heard the story of Jamil and he thought: This will develop into a fine story for the amusement of my master.

And Abu Nawas said to Jamil the Merchant: "O boy, your history wrings sympathy from the heart, but you have conducted this affair and dealt with this matter in a manner natural to youth. Wisdom and experience will gain for you all that your heart desires. Therefore, if you will follow me in everything you will regain fortune. Only you must follow me and do everything that I do and imitate my actions so long as my right eye be open, but when I close my right eye, then you must do nothing and abstain from every action and every deed until your desires are fully gained."

Abu Nawas took Jamil the Merchant to the shop of disguises, and they both put on clothes similar to those of the Chinese, but Abu Nawas left the face of the boy Jamil bare of disguise in all its beauty. Then they went to the river and Abu Nawas produced a bag of gold and bought a boat. Then Abu Nawas purchased a donkey of the most powerful breed and he harnessed it to the boat with ropes, but he did not put the boat in the river. Then Abu Nawas and Jamil the Merchant seated themselves in the boat and the donkey dragged the boat over the sands and mud by the side of the river and they went in the direction of the house which stood in the garden of pomegranate trees. And when they came near to that house Abu Nawas began to sing in this manner:

Aba Daba, Aba Daba,
Daba Aba, Daba Aba,
Aba Daba, Aba Daba.

And, imitating him, Jamil the Merchant sang also this strange song. And in this manner Abu Nawas and Jamil the Merchant passed by the house which stood in the garden of pomegranate trees. And a window opened and the face of the maidservant appeared at it, and Abu Nawas and Jamil the Merchant heard her call out to her mistress: "Come, O mistress, there are strange men travelling over the land in a boat. Come and see this comedy." And the lovely face of the girl Amira appeared at the window, nor was it covered by a veil. And Abu Nawas said to Jamil: "Look

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well at that face, for the fifty dirhems have not left your pocket."

Then Abu Nawas halted the donkey and he got down from the boat, and he took from the boat rice and meat and cooking-pots and he collected wood and he lit a fire. But he lit the fire in the cooking-pot and he put the rice under the cooking-pot, nor was it in any vessel, nor was it immersed in water. And the girl Amira said to the maidservant: "See how these men cook. The rice is not in water, nor will it be heated by that fire. How, then, can this rice be eaten?"

And after the food had been under the fire for ten minutes Abu Nawas said to Jamil the Merchant: "Come, brother, the food is cooked, we will eat." Then Abu Nawas took a handful of rice and poured it into the neck of the shirt of Jamil and, imitating him, Jamil took of the rice and poured it into the neck of Abu Nawas.

And the girl Amira saw and was amazed, and she said to the maid: "We will go down and amuse ourselves with this affair, for stranger sight was never seen." And the girl Amira and her maidservant came out from the house which stood in the garden of pomegranate trees and they came up to Abu Nawas and Jamil the Merchant and saluted them and said: "Welcome, O strangers, and forgive us for our interest in your ways and customs, for we are but two foolish women and we have never seen such strange ways before. What manner of men be you, and from what land?"

And Abu Nawas replied to her and answered her in this fashion: "Know, O Lady, that we are from a land which lies beyond China, and it is so far over the sea from China that it has never been visited by the Arabs, and our king is the great King Aba Daba, the munificent, the wise, and so great is his wisdom that he has laid down rules for our conduct in conformity with philosophy, and the punishment for breaking them is death. He has ordained that since fire is one of the most powerful elements able to consume even books containing wisdom itself, the placing of food over it is insulting and ungracious.

"And such is his wisdom that he has ruled that the riding of animals is heathen, since it puts man over an animal made by God, and he has ordained that wheels are evil since they are loved by the fiend Iblis, who abhors straightness, and what could be more curved and less straight than a wheel? Wheels and riding being forbidden us, we travel in boats, whether on water or dry land, and if you ask why we eat by stuffing the rice down the necks of our shirts, who could put dry rice into his mouth?"

And the girl Amira and the maidservant laughed much at the words of Abu Nawas, and they were astonished, and they said: "Permit us, O strangers, to bring you food which has been delicately cooked, that you may be refreshed after your travels."

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And Abu Nawas answered her and said: "We are grateful and we accept, but on one condition, that you yourselves take the food and pop it into our mouths. For, know you, our master the king, Aba Daba, has a magic glass into which he looks and sees his subjects wherever they may be, but you he cannot see, for you are not of his land. Were he to see our hands go to our mouths, then he would suspect that we were eating food which has been over a fire, but your hands are invisible to him."

And the girl Amira and her maidservant returned to the house which stood in the garden of pomegranate trees and they commenced to prepare food. They killed a sheep and they killed a goose and they killed a chicken and a pigeon and a lark. They cooked the sheep and they cooked the goose and they put the goose inside the sheep and the chicken inside the goose and the pigeon inside the chicken and the lark inside the pigeon. And they put the meat on a mound of amber rice cooked in the most delicate manner with saffron and with truffles. And the girl Amira said to the maidservant: "If there is goodness and virtue in men, then it is in that youth, for his face has the beauty of paradise."

And when the food was prepared Amira and her maidservant carried it out to Abu Nawas and to Jamil. Night had fallen and the world was dark, save for the light of the stars and the new moon. And they carried out to them also the finest and most delicate wine. Then the maidservant fed Abu Nawas by popping the food into his mouth and the girl Amira fed Jamil by popping the food into his mouth, and Abu Nawas and Jamil drank of the wine and were satisfied.

Then Abu Nawas put his arm round the maidservant and he kissed her. And the girl Amira looked at Jamil and saw his beauty, and her heart was full of love, and she said: "Do to me as your friend is doing to my servant."

But Jamil looked at Abu Nawas and saw that his right eye was closed, so he did not follow his example and he replied: "Know, fair girl, that kissing is not allowed by our great King, Aba Daba, until an examination has been passed in its art, and this examination is held once every five years in the presence of the King and the Court. For Aba Daba holds that kissing is a most important matter and must be done in the proper manner. Now, my friend has passed the examination and holds a certificate permitting him to kiss whom he will, but, as for me, I never had the chance to take this examination. And should Aba Daba, our great King, look into his magic glass and see my lips go through the motions of kissing, even though you are invisible to him, he would suspect your presence, and on my return to our country my punishment

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would be that I would have to kiss an iron bar, heated to white heat, until my lips are entirely burnt away."

The girl Amira heard the words of the youth Jamil and she was astonished and her heart was sad, and she watched Abu Nawas kissing her maidservant. And Abu Nawas kissed the maidservant with the most passionate kisses and his hand parted her robe and he opened her dress and took it from her, and truly, O my listeners, modesty forbids me from further mention of this affair.

And the girl Amira looked at Abu Nawas and at her maidservant and she said to the youth Jamil: "Do to me as your friend is doing to my servant." And Jamil looked at Abu Nawas and he saw that his right eye was closed. So he said: "Sweet girl, know you that Aba Daba our great King holds this art even more important than the art of kissing and the examination is a severe one, and though my friend is an accomplished master holding a certificate of distinction, I have never taken the examination nor passed the test. And were Aba Daba to look through his magic glass and see me doing this thing without a certificate of proficiency, then on my return to my country my punishment would be that they would take me and shut me in a cage with a roaring tigress." And the girl Amira heard the words of the youth Jamil and she was astonished and her heart was sad.

But Abu Nawas spoke and said: "If you desire this thing there is only one solution and only one road open to you, and that is that the youth should never return to the country of our great king Aba Daba, but his riches and his wealth in that country will be lost to him. However, if you, O maid, will sign a paper giving him your house and your land and your gold and your furniture and rich stuffs and everything that is yours, and if you promise to marry him, then he can do that which you desire without fear of the consequences."

And the girl Amira looked at Jamil, the youth, and her love for him was great. So Jamil produced paper and pens and the document was written and was signed by the girl Amira and witnessed by Abu Nawas and the maidservant. And the merchant Jamil took the girl Amira and married her in accordance with the law.

And Abu Nawas returned to the Palace and related all these events to the Commander of the Faithful, who laughed heartily at these events. And he ordered that Jamil the Merchant should be granted a high office at Basra, and Abu Nawas he rewarded with a bag of gold.

* * *

To beat a tiger one must have a brother's help.

Old Chinese Proverb

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THE OWL

"People do have hunches," she said, "but they often turn out to be wrong"

by DAVID WALKER

EVEN in that open country the summer afternoon was heavy. It lay over the leaves, on browning wheat, in hedgerows where the birds were silent. It subdued the aerodrome clamour. Alan looked at his watch. The plane was late, and he still had hours to fill in; then the endless sitting, the tedium of flying in darkness to Gander, Newfoundland.

Yes, there was plenty of time. He climbed the gate and followed a path into the wood. It was cooler in there, and still more quiet, and he walked on moss with the ordinary world parallel and indistinct. He was alone in the wood. But he was not alone for long. An owl hooted close at hand. The melancholy call halted him in his tracks.

"Flares at twenty five thousand. Should be a simple operation again tonight," said Micky Vare.

"Yes," said Alan. It should be too. There was nothing very much that could get near a Mosquito at that altitude. Not that you thought about it coming your way; but you observed the proprieties; you kept your fingers crossed.

Alan and Micky had been a crew for three months now. They ate together, got drunk together, went out with the girls together. Micky, from a wild old Irish family, was without a single inhibition in his make-up; while Alan was the son of a schoolmaster in a quiet little village in Sussex. So they were different. But up in the night sky they were one man in trust, bound in friendship more completely than man is ever bound to woman. The friendship of men who face a common danger, together.

They went for their desultory walks. Being country boys they often did that when there was a job ahead; and Alan would talk about the South Downs where he was born, and sometimes Micky would tell of his world over in Ireland.

That afternoon an owl hooted. It wasn't close but it was distinct. One couldn't mistake that noise.

Micky stopped short. He stopped so suddenly that Alan looked at his face. Micky gave a sort of jerk to his head and walked on.

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"I didn't know they hooted in the daytime," said Micky.

"They do occasionally. What kind is it, anyway?"

"That's a tawny owl." Micky was walking faster. In an odd way, you got the feeling that he didn't want to walk, but he had to.

The next time it hooted was very close at hand. "Hoo-oo-oo," long-drawn-out. It wasn't cheerful.

Micky had stopped again. The colour went slowly out of his face; first from the side of his nose, then from his cheeks. They were a red schoolboy colour normally.

"What's up, Mick?"

Micky forced a smile on his face. "The owl," he said.

"What about it?"

"Oh, nothing." The colour was coming back.

"Do you usually go as white as a sheet for nothing?"

Micky stood up straight and looked at him. "I'd better tell you," he said. "It'll probably sound stupid to you, but there's a tradition in my family. When you hear a daylight owl once, all right. But if you hear it twice you're as good as dead."

Alan felt a chill run through him. "That's all—stuff," he said.

Micky smiled again. "Could be," he said. "But the owl is on our coat of arms. We even have a rhyme about it:

'Vare hears the sleepless owl hoot once,
'Tis but a greeting for the nonce;
But twice with the sun still high,
To-whit, to-whoo, then Vare will die.'"

All that went through Alan's mind in a wood near a Buckinghamshire aerodrome four years later. He had to walk straight on, remembering the other time. Perhaps there would be no second hoot. Perhaps old Micky wouldn't come.

But the owl did call again. It hooted sadly from down the woodland path where the moss was quiet and not even a leaf stirred.

But twice with the sun still high,
To-whit, to-whoo, then Vare will die.

His name wasn't Vare. He was Alan Prentice, bachelor, twenty eight years old, manager of an export firm, flying to Canada tonight on business. He was a practical kind of person, not superstitious, nor the kind who feel cold daggers of fear jabbing their backbones. He wasn't that kind, but he'd had a friend who was more than a friend, and the owl had meant something in his case.

Alan returned to the aerodrome.

"Canadian passengers. Flight nine-two-six, please take their seats in the aircraft."

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There it was. Now at last they were off, and better to get it over with. One knew all about the statistics; and that the plane was nearly as safe as a ship. But you knew also for certain that this time was your time, marked up already on the chart. And the same went for those other people, the usual motley crew of air passengers, picking up their hand luggage as if they were going for a bus ride on Sunday afternoon, and not for a ride to kingdom come, somewhere in the grey Atlantic Ocean.

You would go, of course. You didn't cancel because of a hunch about an owl. You'd be no better off when the flight went through as safe as usual, and Alan Prentice still waited in England for the next free seat; then that one would go down.

He picked up his brief case and coat, and followed the others out of the dingy waiting room: a large priest in sober black and sober thought; an elderly couple going home to Toronto; a man in a blue suit with small-time success written all over him and a beery flush on his cheeks, and so on. All the usual ones, including the sexy little piece with the baby and the cockney accent.

The plane glittered out there in the floodlights. She looked colossal, four engines and dorsal curve and tail as tall as a house. She didn't look dynamic. She looked as if she were made just to stand and be beautiful.

"Watch the step, sir." Alan bowed his head and watched the step, and he was inside the comfortable cabin, like a bus, but muted, so that small odd noises ticked loudly.

"May I have your seat card, sir?" This was the stewardess. She had a still, quiet voice and a still, quiet face. You wouldn't say glamorous exactly, but she had something more than the other ladies in the plane.

He found the card and gave it to her. "This is your seat." She had a kindly way about her, impersonal. He sat down alone in the back seat on the starboard side and looked at the diversity of heads in front of him. Fortunately, the cockney woman was seated well forward.

The door was shut, the gangway was trundled off; the first engine turned over, belched smoke and flame, and caught steadily, and the others followed suit one by one. The notice said: FASTEN SAFETY BELTS. NO SMOKING. The steward came in and made his confident little speech, "We are flying direct to Gander. Altitude twenty thousand feet. Moderate head winds. Ten hours' flying time. Refreshments available."

All that was lulling. Then the distant popping sounded louder; they rumbled towards the runway, and the cold grip tightened again on Alan. He fastened his safety belt. *Like a good boy*, he thought, but he made it extra tight because of what he knew about Alan

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Prentice, passenger on Flight nine-two-six; Alan Prentice who had heard the owl hoot twice; no, all the time, again and again.

They'd stopped now, and for a little time there was no more noise than the small popping. But that didn't last. They were running up the engines one by one, and the vibrating thunder of it swelled inside the long cabin and hung there loud and died, and the next one started. Those engines sounded healthy, but—

Take-off is the big risk. Anyone who'd ever flown knew that.

The engines all steadied to a hum, not idling, not hurrying. The flaps whined down. They made a last turn into the lines of runway lights not quite meeting in the darkness; stopped now, propellers idling, glimmering slowly. Then they surged in earnest; she leaped forward free of brakes.

Alan put his hands on the safety belt, leaned his head back and shut his eyes. He'd never known this fear before, which mounted and held you tense and soft and useless with terror. He'd never known it in the war, not in all the things that had happened, not even that last time with Micky. He knew it was crazy, but that didn't make the panic less sharp nor the certainty of death less clear.

They were airborne now; had been for some time. Alan felt a cold trickle down the side of his forehead, and another, but he could not bring himself to open his eyes or to loosen his hands which were clenched on the belt.

"You can undo your belt now, sir."

He heard that and looked quickly out of the corners of his eyes at the stewardess and shut them again.

"Are you all right?" She was watching him with concern.

"All right," he said, his voice sounding funny to himself. He wiped his forehead. "Just scared stiff, I guess." Why in heaven's name did he want to tell her a thing like that?

She didn't show any noticeable surprise. "Shall I get you a drink?"

Well, now, that wasn't a bad idea. "Yes, please. Whisky."

The girl went forward. She was wearing a suit of navy worsted or something like that. It made her well shaped figure look trim with a severe tailor-hidden opulence.

The main lights in the cabin went out, but the small reading lamps cut their beams down through the smoke. The big priest was reading, and a few others; the people doused their lights one by one and moved small pillows to get comfortable. The plane droned on. She was still climbing, Alan realized. The thought of a drink made him feel better, but he was cold.

The girl came back with a big shot of whisky and water; he paid for it and took a gulp. The warmth stole into him at once and he finished it up. The owl lurked on, not quite so close.

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She was sitting at the steward's table just opposite him.

"Thank you very much," he said, putting down the glass.

"Better now?"

"Yes. That was an exhibition I made of myself."

She smiled, friendly, if not warm. "I suppose you've flown a lot?"

"As a matter of fact, yes," he said. "Yes, I have. But why?"

"They're the ones who get that for a moment, now and then. Perhaps they know too much about it, and when they haven't flown for a bit, all the possibilities suddenly hit them."

"I've felt that, too," he said, "but that's small. This is different." He shivered suddenly.

"Want to tell me?" She glanced at the bell panel beside her, then up the cabin. The priest was the only one still reading.

Alan counted them, about thirty, and this stewardess and himself. All those people, and yet it seemed there were only the two of them in the big plane which was flying level now.

"It would bore you." It would be a help to tell it to someone, but he wondered vaguely if it was fair to tell her a thing like that. The edge of his panic might have worn off, but he still knew what was going to happen somewhere between here and Newfoundland. These air girls were calm people. Still—

"Go on," she said. "I'd like to hear."

The soundproofing was wonderful nowadays. He didn't have to speak louder than in a Pullman carriage. He went right back to that afternoon with Micky in the wood, the afternoon he remembered as well as if it were yesterday. He started at the beginning, telling her what it was like between the partners in a two-man plane in wartime or what it could be like if they were dedicated to the job and the plane and each other.

He told it to the round pressurized window opposite, not to her; and he made a jumbled-up job of the telling, as you do when an idea drives the words out pell-mell. She didn't ask any questions.

. . . But twice with the sun still high,
To-whit, to-whoo, then Vare will die.

She put her hand out to the bell panel. "Sorry," she said. "I'm wanted in front." She walked quickly past him and through the door to the crew's quarters, a girl he'd only just met and yet he knew her.

It was ten or twenty minutes before she came back. "Go on," she said soberly, but warm and human, and not at all coquettish like most of them. Twenty five, would she be?

"We did a precision job with our flares that night, and the flak

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didn't get near us. We were halfway home, and I was just saying to myself, 'So much for that old owl,' when the tracer stabbed past us on the port side. I gave her hard stick and rudder and boost into a vertical turn that blacked me right out. But I was too late. Just as I could see again, the shell came in behind. I called Micky on the intercom while I went on taking evasive action. We had the legs of that fighter and he never came up again. I must have called old Mick a hundred times, but he never answered, and I knew he'd got it, and I couldn't get up behind to help him. All I could do was fly home on full throttle. Well, that's what happened."

He looked at the girl. Two tears welled out of her eyes, trickled down her cheeks. She took out her handkerchief and didn't cry any more. They sat there for a long time without speaking.

"You haven't finished the story," she said at last.

"I took a walk this afternoon and I heard an owl hoot twice. My name isn't Vare; my name's Alan Prentice; but I knew it was for me, the same as it was for him the other time."

"You mean you and—Micky shared everything together, and this would be the end?"

"That's exactly what I mean," he said. "Thanks for letting me tell you. I wouldn't have told you if I'd had any guts."

"D'you feel better?"

"Yes. I'm not scared any more. But I know it still."

"People keep having hunches," she said, "and they turn out to be wrong."

"That's true." But he really meant, *That's often true; it isn't true in this case.*

"You know what I think," said Alan. "I think you're the most comforting person I've ever known."

She didn't say anything, but for the first time she looked awarely at him, a different smile at the corners of her lips; for the first time she was a girl and he was a man. That was queer, wasn't it, when he'd just shown her what a useless coward he was?

But she was her professional self again. "I'll get you a pill to make you sleep," she said. She fetched him the pill and a paper cup of water, and went away. *Forgotten me already*, he thought. He pushed the lever and tilted back the seat. Then he took a look with his eye close to the window. It was black outside, no stars, no moon, only the exhaust glow from the port engines.

Alan awoke suddenly. Something had happened to wake him up. Perhaps it was the dawn breaking behind them in the east, laying its green and red and orange on the white ploughed land of clouds. That was a beauty one never saw below. You were some forty people in the big machine, you and the plane in your own high

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place; not this world and not another, but yours to see alone.

It was not the dawn which had awakened him. He knew that when he looked at the wing. The outer engine had stopped and the blades were feathered. Now he remembered the change of noise which had brought him to the surface of sleep.

He felt the same jab of fear again, but not so strong this time; and straight away he began to work the thing out in his mind. Nearly eight hours gone. That meant three more, probably on reduced power. Oh, it was easy; it was almost routine. There was nothing in it to cause the least anxiety; not unless you happened to know what he knew. For a moment he felt quite pleased with himself for having been right. Only he should have warned all these people. He should have stood up in the aerodrome waiting room and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, please pay attention. I warn you not to come on Flight nine-two-six. I'm going myself, but you'd better not come with me."

The steward came through the cockpit door. He had the flight chart in his hand and he gave it to the people in the front seat. Then he came to the back slowly. Half the people were still asleep, and no one seemed to be worrying about the feathered engine.

"How long ago did that happen?" Alan jerked his head towards the window.

"A few minutes ago, sir. That engine was getting a bit rough, so the captain decided to cut it." The steward looked at Alan with a little more than ordinary attention. Perhaps the girl had said to him, "You'd better just watch that one; he's panicky."

"Oh, I see," said Alan. Oddly enough, he wasn't very panicky.

"She flies very nicely on three, you know, sir."

"She does indeed." Which was perfectly true.

The cockney woman came back with her baby. It was yelling loudly. She pouted at Alan as she went past, and he smiled at her because he didn't want her to be afraid.

Then everybody started to move about. Alan himself went and shaved with the electric shaver. Its buzz was a light accompaniment to the big thunder of the engines back there where the soundproofing wasn't so good. He kept his ears cocked for anything wrong with them but the three roared on sweetly.

When he came out again, the stewardess was testing the baby's bottle on the back of her hand. It was all right, so she gave it to the mother. She glanced down at the other passengers and at Alan for a second, and stood while the baby made a ravenous beginning. Then she came back. She was so composed he wondered if she had any feelings inside her, but he remembered the two tears rolling down her cheeks. No tears now, though; just slim and curved and reticent.

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"Did you sleep well, sir?" Rather teasing him, he thought, but he couldn't be sure. He grimaced, but didn't answer. She smiled to herself and picked up a tray and started forward again.

"Listen!" he said.

She stopped beside him. He waited till she bent nearer.

"What's your name?"

"Diana," she said. She turned a faint pink before she hurried off. Diana, just the name for her.

Then it was the captain, a ponderous bulk of a man, soothing the nervous ones by leaving his three engines, talking to the people. He didn't quite hide it, though, if you watched him closely. His eyes were wary, a little shut off from the casual things he was saying. Two hours was what he said. He'd been back and was moving forwards, when there was a distinct bang and a puff of smoke again on the starboard side. The plane yawed violently, the nose dropped. The captain's air of nonchalance fell off him. He went through the door like a lamplighter.

Bad luck, that was, him having to hurry to the cockpit. It put the fear of death into the passengers. They were rigid in their seats. The baby howled from being interrupted in its bottle, and the mother held it tightly.

The plane steadied again. She seemed to be flying well on the two, perhaps a little crabwise though, and the noise was one-sided. Alan watched the screw windmilling till they got that feathered too.

Two engines gone on the same side. It wasn't very funny, was it? He began to work the new problem out in his head. It was an academic question, really; and anyway, you couldn't work it out without knowing performance figures. They might just hold it if it were lower down, but not at this height. No, never.

Sure enough, the air tightened in his eardrums. They were running off the height. Yes, there was fear in the air. You could see it in the heads turned to watch the good engines. Even the ones who'd never flown before knew that this was bad.

Alan had been afraid when the first engine went, but he was not at all afraid now. Was it because one gets strength from seeing other people frightened? Or something altogether different, something to do with balancing one's account and drawing the two lines under the totals and having all that finished and done with?

The steward and the girl brought coffee and sandwiches. They both looked a little pinched, but they were a great help to the others. Everyone took coffee. The old couple going back to Toronto were holding hands. It was touching to see those worn hands exchanging comfort, but they unclasped, took their cups of coffee and spilled it. No one except the priest took sandwiches. He was

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far away in some inner place, and he was eating without thinking.

FASTEN SAFETY BELTS, it said above the door. That wasn't exactly encouraging, either. A lot of coffee was spilled, and everybody groped for his belt. You did your belt up damn quick when they told you.

Now they were reaching the people at the back. The blue-suited businessman with the mottled face grabbed his cup and poured a long stream of whisky into it from his flask.

"Thanks," said Alan. He took his cup from the stewardess. The steward went to the galley, but she stayed at the table. She sat down and played with her hands. Alan drank the coffee which was good and strong. He loosened his belt a bit and turned to give her back the cup. There was something about her face, but he didn't know exactly what it was. She wasn't really so very beautiful.

The light in the cabin changed. It became duller and whiter. He looked out and saw the first cloud wisps hurrying by. They were flimsy, but there was darker cloud below, black turbulent pockets in the whiteness. His ears went on popping, which meant they were still losing height.

She was staring at him when he turned back; and she didn't look away as if he were someone she'd met only last night; she went on watching him with her dark, familiar eyes, the way a wife sometimes watches her husband when she finds him quite pleasing after all.

"How old are you?" he asked, thinking, *There's not much time left for me to get to know her.*

"I'm twenty six," she said, looking down at her hands.

"Were you in the war, then?"

"I was a WAAF."

"That's queer, isn't it? You a WAAF and me in the RAF all that time ago, and we never met until now."

"I was in the Middle East." She hesitated, but then she looked up at him, her eyes bright. "We did meet in the end."

She could mean, "We met at last," or she could mean, "We met at the last." Either way it was something special for her to mean.

"I'm sorry about last night."

"I'm not," she said. "But tell me. Why aren't you afraid now?"

He couldn't very well tell her that; he couldn't explain that it was all worked out and finished and done with.

The plane was bumping now; small joggings which didn't matter; but they were in dark clouds, and rain traced its wind-distorted patterns on the windows, and the big dead starboard wing glimmered with wetness. She began to bucket in earnest,

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surging against strong air, and dropping down, deep down when it was weak, and up again. The air was real. The two good engines laboured on.

"I'll have to go," she said, leaning forward to switch off the light gleaming brightly for Seats 18 and 19. She got up and went hand by hand, holding on to the seats on either side.

"Come back again, Diana!" She might have heard him, but she gave no sign.

Just then the bad bump happened. It was ten times worse than any of the others, and the starboard wing dropped in a long, sickening slither. Alan's heart jumped in him; he wasn't guarded against the moment when it came, and this was it.

No, it wasn't. The captain got her nose down somehow, and followed that wing in a steep turning dive for speed. It jerked the passengers against the safety belts; it threw the steward and Diana in a heap; it sent a shivering, tearing creak through the plane from front to back. But they came out of it a long way down and steadied on to course again.

The cockney was being very ill; still holding her baby, though; a brave enough girl, though she looked so empty headed. The stewardess took the baby and looked for somewhere to sit down. But the big fat priest got up and took it from her and came back to his seat, holding the squalling package in one arm, and steadying himself with the other. He just went on as if he were holding some woman's baby in a jolting village *camion* in his native France.

The storm clouds thinned. The bumps were smaller and smaller, and the big wings stopped whipping up and down a foot or so at the tips. The plane rode on calmly compared with what it had been doing. They tidied the place up and took away the containers, but the smell still hung about. It wasn't a romantic location in which to be watching a girl and not much time to go. Nor was it conducive to romance to look at the sea tumbling around, two thousand feet below, near enough for you to see the movement of the waves, and becoming clearer.

Diana came back. This time she sat right down beside him.

"We're nearly there," she said. "It's only twenty minutes if—" Her eyes flickered to the window, then to him.

"We'll make it," he said, not believing that for a moment. It wasn't much more than a thousand feet now. "You'd better do your belt up."

She did, and he took both her hands in his. They were cold and soft, and there was a cold hard ring on the small finger of her right hand. So they sat hand in hand while the sea crept up.

A little later they saw spruce trees bending in the wind, and a small lake with an island round as any circle, surrounded by more

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land and more lakes, all broken up, perhaps a hundred feet below them, and the strong engines doing their last job.

"I'm going to kiss you," he said when he knew finally that the owl had hooted twice for him and for her, for the priest and for the cockney woman.

Then, a few minutes later, the unbelievable happened; the plane landed crab fashion with a couple of big bumps on the runway at Gander, Newfoundland, and the owl finally stopped hooting in Alan's head.

They moved away from each other, but Alan still held her hands. That was the end. It was over now; it was all done with, and she wouldn't care about him when the fever of anxiety had gone away.

He played idly with her signet ring, thinking of things finished. He happened to look at it just before taking his hands away. It was a plain gold ring with a crest, a man's ring. The crest was an owl.

"Diana!" he said. She turned back, to face him again. "What's your other name?"

"I'm Micky's sister," she said. "Didn't he ever talk about me?"

Yes, he had, now and then, casually. No likeness, except for that familiar thing which had puzzled him.

She burst into tears, sobbing bitterly. She showed all the signs of settling down for a good cry, the kind of cry which comes like a flood to wash away a woman's burden. It comes and makes her strong again; stronger even than the man she comforts.

But this was no time for an air stewardess to weep. All those passengers were loosening their belts and showing signs of action. Some of them knew how nearly they'd been dead, and they were pleased with themselves about it.

"Here, take this!" said Alan, feeling wonderfully strong beside Diana Vare. He gave her his handkerchief and told her to stop crying.

So she gulped and stopped. But not then, not after, never at all would she tell him why she had not said that she was Micky's sister.

* * *

GENTLE CRAFT

The young composer had just finished a new suite and was lying back taking it easy amid a group of admiring friends.

"It must have taken an awful lot out of you," commiserated one of them sympathetically.

"Too true," admitted the young man, languidly, "but nothing like what it took out of Tschaikovsky."

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WILT THOU HAVE . . .?

Indifferent Wife—

There was a man going to be hanged in Galway one time and his wife went to see him the night before, and all she said was, " Where will I sow the flax this year ? " He was vexed at that and he said, " Is that all you are come to say to me ? " " Is it that you are in a sulk because you are going to be hanged in the morning ? " says the wife. That was all she said.

LADY GREGORY, 1852-1932, *The Kiltartan History Book*

Or—

Nobody—children or any one else—can be to me what you are. Ulysses preferred his old woman to immortality, and this absence has led me to see that he was as wise in this as in other things.

T. H. HUXLEY, 1825-1895, *in a letter to his wife*

Loving—

When I was lonely
Your fingers reached for mine, their touch
Natural as sunlight's.

When I was hardened
Your warmness thawed my rock as gently
As music thought.

When I was angry
You smiled : ' But this our day is short
For these long shadows.' . . .

When I was troubled
Your understanding crossed the bounds of
Words to silence.

When I was frightened
Your eyes said : ' Fear's a child's dream. I too
Have dreamed and woken.'

A. S. J. TESSIMOND

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Marriage

For nothing can sweeten felicity it self, but love; but when a man dwels in love, then the brests of his wife are pleasant as the droppings upon the hill of Hermon, her eyes are fair as the light of heaven, she is a fountain sealed, and he can quench his thirst, and ease his cares, and lay his sorrows downe upon her lap, and can retire home as to his sanctuary and refectory, and his gardens of sweetnesse . . .

JEREMY TAYLOR, 1613-1667, *in a Sermon*

Is—

I have, it's true, not married a learned lady nor is she a gay one, but I trust she is good natured and one that will use her utmost endeavour to make me happy. As to her fortune, I shall one day have something considerable and there seems to be rather a flowing stream. Well, here let us drop the subject and begin a new one.

THOMAS TURNER, *Storekeeper of East Hoathly, Sussex, in a diary, June,* 1765

A Lottery

Many a man singeth when he home bringeth
His young wife;
If he knew what he brought, weepen he mought,
Or all his life sigheth.

Author Unknown, Thirteenth Century

But—

Women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. Without that power probably the earth would still be swamp and jungle. How is he to go on giving judgment, civilizing natives, making laws, writing books, dressing up and speechifying at banquets, unless he can see himself at breakfast and at dinner at least twice the size he really is?

VIRGINIA WOOLF, 1882-1941, *A Room of One's Own*

If You Must—

A husband should be very attentive to his wife until the first child is born. After that she can amuse herself at home, while he resumes his jolly habits.

WILLIAM MAGINN, 1793-1842,
Twenty one Maxims to Marry By

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Have a Wife—

There are foure bitter things used for necessity : Rhubarb, Gall, Wormwood, and a dogged wife . . .

NICHOLAS BRETON, 1545-1626, *The Figure of Foure*

Choose One Like This—

My lady had on her side three idols : first and foremost, Jove and supreme ruler, was her lord . . .

All wishes of his were laws with her. If he had a headache, she was ill. If he frowned, she trembled. If he joked, she smiled and was charmed. If he went a-hunting, she was always at the window to see him ride away, her little son crowing on her arm, or on the watch till his return. She made dishes for his dinner ; spiced his wine for him ; made the toast for his tankard at breakfast ; hushed the house when he slept in his chair, and watched for a look when he woke.

If my lord was not a little proud of his beauty, my Lady adored it. She clung to his arm as he paced the terrace, her two fair little hands clasped round his great one ; her eyes were never tired of looking into his face and wondering at its perfection . . . She would wear a gown to rags, because he had once liked it ; and, if he brought her a brooch or a ribbon, would prefer it to all the most costly articles of her wardrobe . . .

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY, 1811-1863, *Esmond*

Or This—

John Anderson, my jo, John,
When we were first acquent,
Your locks were like the raven,
Your bonnie brow was brent ;
But now your brow is beld, John,
Your locks are like the snow ;
But blessings on your frosty pow,
John Anderson, my jo !

John Anderson, my jo, John,
We clamb the hill thegither ;
And monie a canty day, John,
We've had wi' ane anither ;
Now we maun totter down, John,
But hand in hand we'll go,
And sleep thegither at the foot,
John Anderson, my jo.

ROBERT BURNS, 1759-1796

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BLOOD WILL TELL

Mind you, I'm not saying I'd have behaved the way I did if I'd known the facts!

by DON MARQUIS

I AM a middle-sized dog, with spots on me here and there, and several different colours of hair mixed in even where there aren't any spots, and my ears are frazzled a little on the ends where they have been chewed in fights.

At first glance you might not pick me for an aristocrat. But I am one. I was considerably surprised when I discovered it, as nothing in my innermost feelings up to that time, nor in the treatment which I had received from dogs, humans or boys, had led me to suspect it.

I can well remember the afternoon on which the discovery was made. Several of us were lying in the grass, up by the swimming pool, just lazing, and the boys were doing the same. All the boys were naked and comfortable, and no humans were about, the only thing near being a cow or two and some horses, and, although large, they are scarcely more human than boys. Everybody had got tired of swimming, and it was too hot to go rabbiting, and the boys were smoking raspberry leaf cigarettes and talking.

We were listening to the boys talking. A Stray Boy, by which I mean one not claimed, looked after or owned by any dog, said to Freckles Watson, who is my boy:

"What breed would you call that dog of yours, Freck?"

I pricked up my ears at that. I cannot say that I had ever thought much of breeds up to the time that I found out I was an aristocrat myself, believing, as Bill Patterson, a human and the village drunkard, used to say when intoxicated, that often an honest heart beats beneath the outcast's ragged coat.

"Spot isn't any *one* particular breed," said Freckles. "He's considerably mixed."

"He's a mongrel," said Squint Thompson, who is Jack Thompson's boy.

"He isn't," said Freckles so decidedly that I thought a mongrel must be some sort of disgrace. "You're a so-and-so liar, and so's your Aunt Maria."

I thought there might be a scrap then, but I suppose it was too

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hot for any enjoyment in a fight, for Squint let it pass, only saying, "I haven't got an Aunt Maria, and you're another."

"A dog," interrupted the Stray Boy, "has either got to be a thoroughbred or a mongrel. He's either an aristocrat or a common dog."

"Spot isn't a common dog," said Freckles, sticking up for me. "He can beat any dog in the village within five pounds of his weight."

"He's got some spaniel in him," said the Stray Boy.

"His nose is pointed like a hound's nose," said Squint Thompson.

"Well," said Freckles, "neither one of those dogs is a common dog."

"Spot has got some bulldog blood in him, too," said Tom Mulligan, an Irish boy owned by a dog by the name of Mutt Mulligan. "Did you ever notice how Spot will hang on so you can't pry him loose, when he gets into a fight?"

"That proves he is an aristocratic kind of dog," said Freckles.

"There's some gun dog blood in Spot," said the Stray Boy, sizing me up carefully.

"He's got some collie in him, too," said Squint Thompson. "His voice sounds just like a collie's when he barks."

"But his tail is more like a sheepdog's tail," said Tom Mulligan.

"His hair isn't, though," said the Stray Boy. "Some of his hair is like a setter's."

"His teeth are like a mastiff's," said Mutt Mulligan's boy Tom. And they went on like that; I never knew before there were so many different kinds of thoroughbred dogs.

Finally Freckles said: "Yes, he's got all those different kinds of thoroughbred blood in him, and he's got other kinds you haven't mentioned and which you aren't slick enough to see. You may think you're running him down, but what you say just *proves* he isn't a common dog."

I was glad to hear that. It was beginning to look to me as if they had a fairly good case for me being a mongrel.

"How does it prove it?" asked the Stray Boy.

"Well," said Freckles, "you know who the King of Germany is, don't you?"

They said they'd heard of him from time to time.

"Well," said Freckles, "if you were a relation of the King of Germany you'd be a member of the German royal family. You fellows may not know that, but you would. You'd be important, a real aristocrat."

They said they supposed they would.

"Now, then," said Freckles, "if you were a relation of the

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King of Switzerland, too, you'd be just *twice* as important, wouldn't you, as if you were only related to one royal family? Plenty of people are related to just *one* royal family."

Tom Mulligan butted in and said that long ago, in the early days, his relations were the Kings of Ireland; but no one paid any attention.

"Suppose, then, you're a cousin of the Queen of England into the bargain, and your grandfather was King of Scotland, and the Prince of Wales and the Emperor of France and the Sultan of Russia and the rest of those royalties were relations of yours, wouldn't all that royal blood make you *twenty times* more aristocratic than if you had just *one* measly little old king for a relation?"

The boys had to admit that it would.

"You wouldn't call a fellow with all that royal blood in him a *mongrel*, would you?" said Freckles. "You bet your stamp-album you wouldn't! A fellow like that is jolly nearly equal to a duke or a prime minister. Whenever he travels round the country they turn out the brass bands; and the firemen and the Boy Scouts parade, and the mayor makes a speech, and there's picnics and fireworks, and he gets jolly nearly anything he wants. People rush to see him, just like they do to see a famous bowler or a champion boxer. If you called a fellow like that a mongrel, and it was found out, you would be sent to gaol for it."

Tom Mulligan said yes, that was so; his grandfather came to this country through getting into some kind of trouble about the King of Somewhere-or-other and the King of Somewhere wasn't nearly as wonderful as the fellow Freckles described, nor nearly so royal.

"Well, then," said Freckles, "it's the same with my dog, Spot. *Any* dog can be full of just *one* kind of thoroughbred blood. That's nothin'! But Spot has got more different kinds of thoroughbred blood in him than any dog you ever saw. By your own opinion he has. He's got *all* kinds of thoroughbred blood in him. If there's any kind he hasn't got, you just name it, will you?"

"He hasn't got any Great Dane in him," yelled the Stray Boy, hating to give in.

"You're a liar; he jolly well has," said Freckles.

The Stray Boy took this badly, and there was a fight. All us dogs and boys gathered round in a ring to watch it, and I was more anxious than anybody else. For the way that fight went would decide what I was.

Well, Freckles won, and he rubbed the Stray Boy's nose in the mud; and that's how I came to be an aristocrat.

Being an aristocrat may sound simple, and it may look simple to outsiders; and it may really be simple for those that are used

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to it. But it wasn't simple for *me*. It came on me suddenly, the knowledge that I was one, and without warning. I didn't have any time to practise being one. One minute I wasn't, and the next minute I was ; and while, of course, I felt important over it, there were spells when I could get discouraged, too, and wish I could go back to being a common dog again.

I kept expecting my tastes to change. I watched and waited for them to. But they didn't. No change at all set in on me. But I had to pretend I was changed. Then I would get tired of pretending and be downhearted about the whole thing, and say to myself, " There has been a mistake. I am *not* an aristocrat after all."

I might have gone on like that for a long time, partly in joy over my noble birth, and partly in doubt, without ever being certain, if it had not been for a happening which showed, as Freckles said, that blood will tell.

It happened the day that *Wilson's World's Greatest One Ring Circus and Menagerie* came to our village. Freckles and me, and all the other dogs and boys, and a good many humans, too, followed the caravans through the village and back to the circus site. Many went in, and the ones that didn't have any money hung about outside for a while, and explained to each other they were going at night, because a circus is more fun at night. Freckles didn't have any money, but his father was going to take him that night, so, when the parade was over, he and I went back to his father's grocer's shop in the High Street, and I crawled under the butter and bacon marble counter to take a nap.

Freckles' father, Jim Watson, doesn't mind you hanging round the shop if you don't drag bones in or scratch too many fleas off. So I'm there a considerable time in warm weather.

Under the butter counter is the coolest place for a dog in the whole village. There's a zinc bowl under there always full of water, where Mr. Watson dips the butter patters, and there's always some water slopped on to the floor. It's damp and dark there always. Outdoors it may be so hot in the sun that your tongue hangs out so far you can tangle your feet in it, but under there you can lie comfortably and snooze, and when you wake up and want a drink, there's the bowl with the patters in it. And flies don't bother you, because they stay on top of the counter, and fight over the muslins covering the piles of butter and bacon.

Circus day was a hot one, and I must have drowsed off quickly after lying down. I don't know how long I slept, but when I woke up it was with a start, for something important was going on outside in the High Street ; I could hear people screaming and swearing

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and running along the pavement, and horses whinnying, and dogs barking, and old Tom Cramp, the village constable, was yelling out that he was an officer of the law, and the steam whistle on the flour mill was blowing. And it all seemed to be happening in front of our shop.

I was thinking I'd better go out and investigate, when the swing doors crashed, as though a runaway horse had come through them, and the next minute a big yellow dog was at the back of the counter, trying to crouch down as though he were scared and was hiding. He backed me into the corner without seeing me or knowing I was there, and almost squashed me.

No dog—and it never struck me that, perhaps, this wasn't a dog—no dog can just calmly sit down on me like that when I'm waking up from a nap, and get away with it, no matter *how* big he is, and in spite of the darkness under there I could see and feel that this was the biggest dog in the world. I had been dreaming I was in a fight, anyhow, when he crowded in there with his hind-quarters on top of me, and I bit him on the hind leg.

When I bit him he let out a noise like a threshing machine starting up. It wasn't a bark. Nothing but the end of the world coming could bark like that. It was more like a noise I heard once when the boys dared Freckles to lie down between the railway lines and let a train run over him about a foot above his head; I lay down there with him, and it nearly deafened both of us. When he let out that noise I said to myself, "Great guns! What kind of a dog have I bitten?"

And as he made that noise he jumped up, knocking over the counter—marble top and all—with a crash, and rushed to the window, with his tail swinging, and me right after him, practically on top of him. It wasn't that I exactly intended to chase him, you understand, but I was panicky because of that awful noise he had made, and I wanted to get away from there, so I went the same way as he did. So when he bulged through the window on to the street I bulged straight after him, and as he hit the pavement I bit him again.

The first time I bit him because I was cross, but the second time I bit because I was so nervous I didn't know what I was doing. And at the second bite, without even looking behind him, he jumped clean over a horse and cart in front of the shop, and landed right in the middle of the road with his tail between his legs.

And then I realized for the first time that he wasn't a dog at all. He was the circus lion.

Mind you, I'm not saying that I would have bitten him at all if I'd known at the start he was a lion.

And I'm not saying I *wouldn't* have bitten him, either.

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But actions speak louder than words, and records are records, and you can't go back on them, and the fact is I *did* bite him. I bit him twice.

And the whole village saw that second bite, when we came bulging through the window together. Everyone was climbing up telegraph poles, and looking out of upstairs windows, and crawling behind fences into cellars, and trying to hide behind the village pump; but no matter where they were trying to get to, they had one eye on that lion, and they saw me chasing him out of that shop. I don't say I would have chased him if he hadn't been just ahead of me, and I don't say I wouldn't have chased him, but the facts are I *did* chase him.

The lion was just as scared as the villagers, and the villagers were so scared they didn't realize the lion was scared at all, and when his trainer got hold of him in the road he was longing to be led back to his cage, and he lay down in the far corner of it, away from the people, and trembled until he shook the wagon it was on.

But if there were any further doubts in any minds about me being an aristocrat, the way I bit and chased that lion settled them forever. That night Freckles and his father went to the circus, and I marched along with them. And every person in the village, as they saw Freckles and me marching in, said:

"There goes the dog that bit the lion!"

And Freckles, every time anyone congratulated him on being the boy that belonged to that kind of a dog, would say:

"Blood will tell! Spot's an aristocrat, he is."

And he and I and his father stopped in front of the lion's cage that night and took a good long look at him. He was an old moth-eaten lion, and I was sorry for him caged up there, but he was a lion all right, and he looked terribly big in there. He looked so big that all my doubts came back to me, and I said to myself:

"Honestly, now, if I'd *known* he was a lion—and that *big* a lion—when I bit him, *would* I have bitten him, or would I not?"

But just then Freckles reached down and patted me on the head and said: "You weren't afraid of him, were you, old Spot! Yes, sir, blood will tell!"

* * *

A THOUSAND TIMES NOT!

A Filipino schoolteacher sent in her resignation to her American superintendent in these words: "*I wish to resignate. My works are too many and my salaries are too few. Moreover, my principal makes many lovings to me, to which I say, 'Oh, not.'*"

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I'LL NOT LOOK FOR WINE

**"Such a strange kind of man," she said,
"and such a strange, haunting song"**

by RAY BRADBURY

THEY had a house of crystal pillars by the edge of the empty sea, and every morning you could see Mrs. K. eating the golden fruits that grew from the crystal walls, or cleaning the house with handfuls of magnetic dust which, taking all dirt with it, blew away on the hot wind.

In the afternoon, when the fossil sea was warm and motionless, the wine trees stiff and silent in the yard, and the little distant Martian bone town was all enclosed, and no one drifted through their doors, you could see Mr. K. himself, seated in his room reading from a metal book with raised hieroglyphics over which he brushed his fingers, as one might play a harp. And from the book, as his fingers stroked, a voice sang, a soft ancient voice, which told tales of when the sea was red steam on the shore and ancient men had carried clouds of metal insects and electric spiders into battle.

Mr. and Mrs. K. had lived by the dead sea for twenty years, and their ancestors had lived in this same house, which had turned and followed the sun, flowerlike, for ten centuries.

Mr. and Mrs. K. were not old. They had the fair, brownish skin of the true Martian; the yellow coin eyes, the soft, musical voices. Once they had liked painting pictures with chemical fire, swimming in the canals in the seasons when the wine trees filled them with green liquors, and talking into the dawn together by the blue phosphorous portraits in the speaking room.

They were not happy now.

This morning Mrs. K. stood between the pillars of her house, listening to the desert sands heat, melt into yellow wax, and seemingly run on the horizon.

She wished that something would happen.

She waited, watching the red sky of Mars as if it might at any moment grip in on itself, contract, and expel a shining miracle down upon the sand.

Tired of waiting, she walked through the misting pillars. A

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gentle rain sprang from the fluted pillar tops, cooling the scorched air, falling gently on her. On hot days it was like wading in a creek. The house floors glittered with cool streams. In the distance she heard her husband playing his book, steadily, his fingers never tired of the old songs. Quietly, she wished he might one day again spend as much time holding and touching her like a little harp as he did his incredible books.

But no. She shook her head, an imperceptible, forgiving shrug. Her eyelids closed softly upon her golden eyes. Marriage made people old and familiar, while still young.

She lay back in a chair that moved to take her shape, even as she moved. She closed her eyes tightly and nervously.

The dream occurred.

Her fingers trembled, came up, grasped at the air. A moment later she sat up, startled, gasping.

She glanced about, swiftly, as if expecting someone there before her. She seemed disappointed that the space between the pillars was empty.

Her husband appeared in a triangular door. "Ylla, did you call?" he asked, irritably.

"No!" she cried.

"I thought I heard you cry out."

"Did I? I was almost asleep and had a dream."

"In the daytime? You don't often do that."

She sat up as though struck in the face by the dream. "How strange, how very strange," she murmured. "The dream."

"Oh?" He evidently wished to return to his book.

"I dreamed about a man."

"A man?"

"A tall man, six feet one inch tall."

"How absurd; a giant, a misshapen giant."

"Somehow"—she tried the words—"he looked all right. In spite of being tall. And he had, oh, I know you'll think it silly, he had *blue* eyes!"

"Blue eyes! Gods!" cried Mr. K. "What'll you dream next? I suppose he had black hair?"

"How did you *guess*?" She was excited.

"I picked the most unlikely colour," he replied, coldly.

"Well, black it was!" she exulted. "And he had a very white skin; oh, he was *most* unusual! He was dressed in a strange uniform and he came down out of the sky and spoke pleasantly to me." She smiled.

"Out of the sky; what nonsense!"

"He came in a metal thing that glittered in the sun," she remembered. She closed her eyes to shape it again. "I dreamed

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there was the sky, and something sparkled like a coin thrown in the air, and suddenly it grew large and fell down softly to land, a long silver craft, round and alien. And a door opened in the side of the silver object and this tall man stepped out."

"If you worked harder, you wouldn't have these silly dreams."

"I rather enjoyed it," she replied, lying back. "I never suspected myself of such an imagination. Black hair, blue eyes, and white skin! What a strange man, and yet—quite handsome."

"Wishful thinking."

"You're unkind. I didn't think him up on purpose, he just came in my mind while I drowsed. It wasn't like a dream. It was so unexpected and different. He looked at me and he said, 'I've come in my ship from the third planet. My name is Nathaniel York—'"

"A stupid name; it's no name at all," objected the husband.

"Of course it's stupid, because it's a dream," she explained softly. "And he said, 'This is the first trip across space. There are only two of us on our ship, myself and my friend John.'"

"*Another* stupid name."

"And he said, 'We're from a city on *Earth*; that's the name of our planet,'" continued Mrs. K. "That's what he said. '*Earth*' was the name he spoke. And he used another language. Somehow, I understood him. With my mind. Telepathy, I suppose."

Mr. K. turned away. She stopped him with a word. "Yll?" she called, quietly. "Do you ever wonder if, well, if there *are* people living on the third planet?"

"The third planet is incapable of supporting life," stated the husband patiently. "Our scientists have said there's far too much oxygen in their atmosphere."

"But wouldn't it be fascinating if there *were* people? And they travelled through space in some sort of ship?"

"Really, Ylla, you know how I hate this emotional wailing. Let's get on with our work."

It was late in the day when she began singing the song as she moved among the whispering pillars of rain. She sang it over and over again.

"What's that song?" snapped her husband at last, walking in to sit at the fire table.

"I don't know." She looked up, surprised at herself. She put her hand to her mouth, unbelieving. The sun was setting. The house was closing itself in, like a giant flower, with the passing of light. A wind blew among the pillars, the fire table bubbled its fierce pool of silver lava. The wind stirred her russet hair, crooning

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softly in her ears. She stood silently looking out into the great sallow distances of sea bottom, as if recalling something, her yellow eyes soft and moist.

"*Drink to me only with thine eyes, And I will pledge with mine,*" she sang, softly, quietly, slowly. "*Or leave a kiss but in the cup And I'll not look for wine.*" She hummed, moving her hands in the wind, ever so lightly, her eyes shut. She finished the song.

It was very beautiful.

"Never heard that song before. Did you compose it?" he enquired, his eyes sharp.

"No. Yes. No, I don't know, really!" She hesitated, wildly. "I don't even know what the words are; they're another language!"

"What language?"

She dropped portions of meat numbly into the simmering lava. "I don't know." She drew the meat forth, a moment later, cooked, served on a plate for him. "It's just a silly thing I made up, I suppose; I don't know why."

He said nothing. He watched her drown meats in the hissing fire pool. The sun was gone. Slowly, slowly the night came in to fill the room, swallowing the pillars and both of them, like a dark wine poured to the ceiling. Only the silver lava's glow lit their faces.

She hummed the strange tune again.

Instantly he leaped from his chair and stalked angrily from the room.

Later, in isolation, he finished supper.

When he arose, he stretched, glanced at her and suggested, yawning, "Let's take the flame birds to town tonight to see an entertainment."

"You don't *mean* it?" she said. "Are you feeling well?"

"What's so strange about that?"

"But we haven't gone to an entertainment for at least six months!"

"I think it's a good idea."

"Suddenly, you're so solicitous," she said.

"Don't talk like that," he replied, peevishly. "Do you or do you not want to go?"

She looked out at the pale desert. The twin white moons were rising. Cool water ran softly about her toes. She began to tremble just the least bit. She wanted very much to sit quietly here, soundless, not moving until this thing occurred, this thing expected all day, this thing that could not happen, but might. A drift of song brushed through her mind.

"Do you good," he urged. "Come along."

"I'm tired," she said. "Some other night."

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"Here's your scarf." He handed her a phial. "We haven't gone out anywhere for months."

"Except you, twice a week, to Xi City." She wouldn't look at him.

"Business," he said.

"Oh?" She whispered to herself.

From the phial a liquid poured, turned to blue mist, settled about her neck quivering.

The flame birds waited, like a bed of hot coals, glowing on the cool, smooth sands. The white canopy ballooned on the night wind, flapping softly, tied by a thousand green ribbons to the birds.

Ylla laid herself back in the canopy and, at a word from her husband, the birds leaped up, burning, towards the dark sky. The ribbons tautened, the canopy lifted. The sand slid whining beneath, the blue hills drifted by, drifted by, leaving their home behind, the raining pillars, the caged flowers, the singing books, the whispering floor creeks.

She did not look at her husband. She heard him crying out to the birds as they rose higher, like ten thousand hot sparkles, so many red-yellow fireworks in the heavens, tugging the canopy like a flower petal, burning through the wind.

She didn't watch the dead, ancient bone-chess cities slide past beneath them, or the old canals filled with emptiness and dreams. Past dry rivers and dry lakes they flew like a shadow of the moon, like a torch burning.

She watched only the sky.

The husband spoke.

She watched the sky.

"Did you hear what I said?"

"What?"

He exhaled. "You might pay attention."

"I was thinking."

"I never thought you were a nature lover, but you're certainly interested in the sky tonight," he said.

"It's very beautiful."

"I was thinking," said the husband slowly. "I thought I'd get in touch with Hulle tonight. I'd like to talk to him about our spending some time, oh, only a week or so, in the Blue Mountains. It's just an idea—"

"The Blue Mountains!" She gripped the canopy rim with one hand, turning swiftly towards him.

"Oh, it's just a suggestion."

"When do you want to go?" she asked, trembling.

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"I thought we might leave tomorrow morning. You know, an early start and all that," he said, very casually.

"But we *never* go so early in the year!"

"Just this once, I thought—" He smiled. "Do us good to get away. Some peace and quiet. You know. You haven't anything *else* planned? We'll go, won't we?"

She took a breath, waited, and then replied. "No."

"What!" His cry startled the birds. The canopy jerked.

"No," she said firmly. "It's settled. I won't go."

He looked at her. They did not speak after that. She turned away.

The birds flew on, ten thousand firebrands down the wind.

In the dawn, the sun, through the crystal pillars, melted the fog that supported Ylla as she slept. All night she had hung above the floor, buoyed by the soft carpeting of mist which poured from the walls when she lay down to rest. All night she had slept on this silent river, like a boat upon a soundless tide. Now the fog dispersed, the mist withdrew, until she was deposited upon the shore of wakening.

She opened her eyes.

Her husband stood over her. He looked as if he had stood there for hours, watching. She did not know why, but she could not look him in the face.

"You've been dreaming again," he said. "You spoke aloud and kept me awake."

"I'll be all right."

"You talked a lot in your sleep."

"Did I?" She started.

Dawn was cold in the room.

"What was your dream?"

She had to think a moment to remember. "The ship. It came from the sky again, landed, and the tall man stepped out and talked with me, laughing, and it was pleasant."

Mr. K. touched a pillar. Founts of warm water leaped up, steaming; the chill vanished from the room. Mr. K.'s face was impassive.

"And then," she said, "this man, who said his strange name was Nathaniel York, told me I was beautiful and—and kissed me."

"Ha!" cried the husband, turning violently away.

"It's only a dream." She was amused.

"Keep your silly, feminine dreams to yourself!"

"You're acting like a child." She lapsed back upon the few remaining bits of chemical mist. After a moment she laughed softly. "I've thought of some more of the dream," she confessed.

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"Well, what is it, what *is* it!" he shouted.

"Yll, you're so bad tempered."

"Tell me!" he demanded. "You can't keep secrets from me!" His face was dark and rigid as he stood over her.

"I've never seen you like this," she replied, half shocked, half entertained. "All that happened was this Nathaniel York person told me, well, he told me that he'd take me away in his ship, into the sky with him, and take me back to his planet with him. It's really quite ridiculous."

"Ridiculous, is it!" he almost screamed. "You should have heard yourself, fawning on him, talking to him, singing with him; oh, gods, all night—you should have *heard* yourself!"

"Yll!"

"When's he landing? Where's he coming down with his ship!"

"Yll, lower your voice."

He bent stiffly over her. "And *in* this dream—" he seized her wrist "—didn't the ship land over in Green Valley, *didn't* it? Answer me!"

"Why, yes—"

"And it landed this afternoon, didn't it?" he kept at her.

"Yes, yes, I think so; yes, but only in a dream!"

"Well," he flung her hand away, rigidly. "It's good you're truthful! I heard every word you said in your sleep. You mentioned the valley and the time." Breathing hard, he walked between the pillars like a man blinded by a lightning bolt. Slowly, his breath returned. She watched him as though he were quite insane. She arose finally and went to him. "Yll," she whispered.

"I'm all right."

"You're sick."

"No." He forced a tired smile. "Just childish. Forgive me, darling." He gave her a rough pat. "Too much work lately. I'm sorry. I think I'll lie down for a while—"

"You were so excited."

"I'm all right now. Fine." He exhaled. "Let's forget it."

"It was only a dream."

"Of course." He kissed her cheek mechanically. "Only a dream."

At noon the sun was hot and the hills shimmered in the light.

"Aren't you going to Town?" asked Ylla.

"Town?" He raised his brows faintly.

"This is the day you always go." She adjusted a flower cage on its pedestal. The flowers stirred, opening their hungry yellow mouths.

He closed his book. "No. It's too hot, and it's late."

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"Oh." She finished her task and moved towards the door. "Well, I'll be back soon."

"Wait a minute! Where are you going?"

She was in the door swiftly. "Over to Pao's. She invited me!"

"Today?"

"I haven't seen her for a long time. It's only a little way."

"Over in Green Valley, isn't it?"

"Yes, just a walk, not far; I thought I'd—" She hurried.

"I'm sorry, really sorry," he said, running to fetch her back, looking very concerned about his forgetfulness. "It slipped my mind. I invited Dr. Nlle to come in this afternoon."

"Dr. Nlle!" She edged towards the door.

He caught her elbow and drew her steadily in. "Yes."

"But Pao—"

"Pao can wait, Ylla. We must entertain Nlle."

"Just for a few minutes—"

"No, Ylla."

"No?"

He shook his head. "No. Besides, it's a terribly long walk to Pao's. All the way through Green Valley and then past the big canal and down, isn't it? And it'll be very hot, and Dr. Nlle would be delighted to see you. Well?"

She did not answer. She wanted to break and run. She wanted to cry out. But she only sat in the chair, turning her fingers over, slowly, staring at them, expressionlessly, trapped.

"Ylla?" he murmured. "You *will* be here, won't you?"

"Yes,"-she said, after a long time. "I'll be here."

"All afternoon?"

Her voice was dull. "All afternoon."

Late in the day, Dr. Nlle had not put in an appearance. Ylla's husband did not seem very surprised. When it was quite late he murmured something, went to a cupboard and drew forth a long yellowish tube, ending in a bellows and a trigger. He held it in his hands and considered it. It hummed constantly, an insect hum. From it, hordes of golden bees could be flung out with a high shriek. Golden bees that stung, poisoned, and fell lifeless, like seeds on the sand.

"Where are you going?" she asked with an interest she hadn't wanted to show.

"What? Oh." He turned the bellows over, listening carefully to its evil humming. "If Dr. Nlle insists on being late, I'm not waiting for him. I'm going out to hunt for a while. I'll be back. You will stay at home, won't you?" He did not look at her.

"Yes."

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"And tell Dr. Nlle I'll return shortly. Just hunting."

The triangular door closed. His footsteps faded down the hill.

She watched him walking through the sunlight, until he was gone. Then she resumed her tasks with the magnetic dusts and the new fruits to be plucked from the crystal walls. She worked with energy and dispatch, but on occasion a numbness took hold of her and she caught herself singing that strange and memorable song and looking out beyond the crystal pillars at the sky.

She held her breath and stood very still, waiting.

It was coming nearer.

At any moment it might happen.

It was like those days when you heard a thunderstorm coming and there was the waiting silence and then the faintest pressure of the atmosphere as the climate blew over the land in shifts and shadows and vapours. And the change pressed at your ears and you were suspended in the waiting time of the coming storm. You began to tremble. The sky was stained and coloured; the clouds thickened, the mountains took on an iron taint. The caged flowers blew with faint sighs of warning. You felt your hair stir softly. Somewhere in the house, the voice-clock sang, "Time, time, time, time—" very gently; no more than water tapping on velvet.

And then, the storm. The electric illumination, the engulfments of dark wash and sounding black fell down, shutting in, forever.

That's how it was, now. A storm gathered, yet the sky was clear. Lightning was expected, yet there was no cloud.

Ylla moved through the breathless summerhouse. Lightning would strike from the sky any instant, there would be a thunderclap, a ball of smoke, a silence, footsteps on the path, a rap on the crystalline door, and her *running* to answer.

Crazy Ylla! she scoffed. Why think these wild things with your idle mind?

And then, it happened.

There was a warmth as of a great fire passing in the air. A whirling rushing sound. A gleam in the sky, of metal.

Ylla cried out.

Running through the pillars, she flung wide a door. She faced the hills. But by this time there was nothing.

She was about to race down the hill, when she stopped herself. She was supposed to stay here, go nowhere. The doctor was coming to call, and her husband would be angry if she ran off.

She waited in the door, breathing rapidly, her hand outstretched.

She strained to see over towards Green Valley, but saw nothing.

Silly woman. She went inside. You and your imagination, she thought. That was nothing but a bird, a leaf, the wind, or a fish in the canal. Sit down. Rest.

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She sat.

A shot sounded.

Very clearly, sharply, the sound of the evil insect weapon.

Her body jerked with it.

It came from a long way off. One shot. The swift humming distant bees. One shot. And then a second shot, precise and cold, and far away.

Her body winced again and for some reason she started up, screaming and screaming, and never wanting to stop screaming. She ran violently through the house and once more threw wide the door.

The echoes were dying away, away.

Gone.

She waited in the yard, her face pale.

Finally, with slow steps, her head down, she wandered about the pillared rooms, laying her hand to things, her lips quivering, until finally she sat alone, in the darkening wine room, waiting. She began to wipe an amber glass with the hem of her scarf.

And then, from far off, the sound of footsteps, crunching on the thin, small rocks.

She rose up to stand in the centre of the quiet room. The glass fell from her fingers, smashing to bits.

The footsteps hesitated outside the door.

Should she speak; should she cry out, "Come in; oh, come in!"

She went forward a few paces.

The footsteps walked up the ramp. A hand twisted the door latch.

She smiled at the door.

The door opened. She stopped smiling.

It was her husband.

He entered the room and looked at her for only a moment. Then he snapped the weapon bellows open, cracked out two dead bees, heard them spat on the floor as they fell, stepped on them and placed the empty bellows-gun in the corner of the room as Ylla bent down and tried, over and over, with no success, to pick up the pieces of the shattered glass. "What were you doing?" she asked.

"Nothing," he said, with his back turned.

"But, the gun. I heard you fire it. Twice."

"Just hunting. Once in a while I like to hunt. Has Dr. Nlle arrived?"

"No."

"Wait a minute." He snapped his fingers disgustedly. "Why, I remember now. He was supposed to visit us *tomorrow* afternoon. How stupid of me."

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They sat down to eat. She looked at her food and did not move her hands. "What's wrong?" he asked, not looking up from dipping his meat in the bubbling lava.

"I don't know. I'm not hungry," she said.

"Why not?"

"I don't know; I'm just not."

The sun was going down. The room was small and suddenly cold.

"I've been trying to remember," she said, in the silent room, across from her cold, erect, golden-eyed husband.

"Remember what?" He sipped his wine.

"That song. That fine and beautiful song." She closed her eyes and hummed, but it was not the song. "I've forgotten it. And, somehow, I don't want to forget it. It's something I want always to remember." She moved her hands as if the rhythm might help her to remember all of it. Then she lay back in her chair. "I can't remember." She began to cry.

"Why are you crying?" he asked.

"I don't know. I don't know; but I can't help it. I'm sad and I cry, and I don't know why, but I'm crying."

Her head was in her hands, her shoulders moved again and again.

"You'll be all right tomorrow," he said.

She did not look up at him, she looked only at the empty desert and the very bright stars coming out now on the black sky, and far away there was a sound of wind rising and canal waters stirring cold in the long canals. She shut her eyes, trembling.

"Yes," she said. "I'll be all right tomorrow."

* * *

WRITERS OF TODAY

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Cavalcade

YOU could take the soul from a sun-dark shadow,
You could take the salt from the savage sea,
You could take the green from a midsummer meadow,
But never my wave-white love from me.

Take from a seed the life inside it,
Split the heaven in a grain of corn,
Rid the moon of the stars that ride it,
Steal the spear from a unicorn.

Take the song from the swirling river,
Strip the husk from a steel-cold stone ;
But we whom the wind and wave brought together
Still can sleep in the shade of the throne.

Stone-wide walls can crack and tumble,
Diamonds die in the king-proud crown ;
But this white tower will never crumble;
A tree sings here will never blow down.

For my love is locked in my heart's foundation,
Sunk in the depths of my soul's red sea ;
My love is the light of the first creation,
For she gave me her heart and it burns in me.

DONALD WATT

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EASTING DOWN

It was a challenge — and a risk no ordinary man would take

by SHALIMAR

THE *Knightley*, a tramp steamer of about 5,000 tons gross, was lying in Victoria Basin, Cape Town. Breakfast in the saloon was nearly over. It had been eaten in comparative silence, for the *Knightley* was not a particularly happy ship; the captain and the chief officer thought very little of each other, the captain's thoughts being distinctly the less charitable. Towards the end of the meal there had been some talk about the ship's work, which encouraged the chief officer to get on to his favourite subject—cleanliness, and the slapping on of paint.

"The bulwarks on the fore-deck require chipping very badly, but we'll get that done during the next week or so," he said. "Luckily we're in for a fine weather passage."

"Indeed, Mr. Wilkins," the captain remarked loftily.

He rose and left the saloon. The other officers drained their coffee cups and also prepared to go.

"What's he getting at now?" the chief officer growled.

His officers never knew what Captain Hartnall was getting at, and he certainly never took the trouble to enlighten them. He conveyed the impression that he was much too superior to reach down to their meagre intellects, and the impression was probably a correct one; for if ever a man suffered from the reverse of what, in modern jargon, is termed a complex of inferiority, that man was Captain Hartnall. With one exception not a man in the ship could ignore his own inferiority when in the captain's presence—the exception being the young third officer, a Scotsman from Aberdeenshire, who, placid and laconic, had never discovered any reason why he should be either intimidated or unduly impressed even by a successful shipmaster like his captain who had never suffered the slightest check to his meteoric career and was, without doubt, an outstanding seaman.

Still only thirty two, Captain Hartnall had got command of a barque when he was twenty four—a great, modern slab-sided barque that sailormen declared was too slow to get out of her own way. He had been chock-full of confidence from the moment

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he boarded her. Her code number in the International Book of Signals was M.N.B.S., and on the first night out, bowling down-channel before a fresh breeze, he was heard reciting a rhyme of his own composing:

"*M.N.B.S.,*
My name brings success,
Go, you flat-bottomed scow, go."

The "flat-bottomed scow" went so well that he drove her out to Australia in twenty days less than his predecessor had taken on the previous voyage, and since that first successful passage he had never tired of proving to his owners that he was the smartest man in their employ. Because of that, and the fact that he was at all times acutely aware of his own merits, he was far from being a favourite with his brother shipmasters.

Captain Hartnall walked towards the town. The *Knightley* would be ready for sea in a couple of days and he had some preliminary clearing to do at the agent's office. When this was done, he strolled along to the Grand Hotel and entered the lounge, where he found an acquaintance, a much older man who commanded another tramp steamer lying in the same dock. Both vessels were bound for Port Pirie, South Australia, in ballast, to load zinc concentrates, and over their drinks the two masters discussed their coming passages.

"I'm a couple of knots faster than you, so I'll probably pick you up somewhere to the nor'a'd of New Amsterdam, even if I sail a week later," the older man chaffed.

"You won't pick me up at all, and certainly not on that route," Captain Hartnall retorted. "I'm going to run the easting down!"

"You're going to do *what*?"

"Run the easting down!"

"You'll regret it," the other man said seriously.

"Why? I've done it in a barque not a quarter the size of the *Knightley*."

"Oh, certainly; but the barque hadn't got a racing propeller under her counter," the other said drily. "What's the idea?"

"To make a quicker passage. Lots of steamers used to do it—"

"Yes, they *used* to, Hartnall; they don't now." The other man sat back comfortably in his chair. "Anyhow, a fine weather passage along the edge of the south-east trades as far as the hundredth meridian, then south-eastward towards the Australian coast will do me," he declared. "I'll probably get all the bad weather I want off the Leeuwin at this time of the year, and I'm not hankering after any more. By the way, didn't you have wireless that time I met you in New York?"

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"Yes, but they took it out of her after the war. Hard times, couldn't afford it, the owners said."

"H'm! False economy on these long voyages!"

Two days later, on a bright, calm morning, the *Knightley* hauled out of the docks, rounded Green Point, and stood down the shore of the Cape Peninsula. When the chief officer relieved the second on the bridge at four o'clock in the afternoon the faint outline of Cape Point was astern, and no land was visible along the port beam.

"Sou'-sou'-east is the course by the steering compass; south-twenty-east by the standard," the second officer said.

"Sou'-sou'-east! Here, what the—?" the puzzled chief demanded.

"We're going off to do some exploring in the ruddy Antarctic," the second answered bitterly. "Now you know what he was getting at."

Running the easting down! Sweeping along the troubled four-thousand-mile track that leads from the south of the Cape of Good Hope to the Leeuwin at the south-west corner of Australia, before the furious west winds and the rushing seas that sweep without let or hindrance halfway round the globe. Away down in that trackless waste of waters that lie beyond the parallel of 45° south latitude a succession of beautiful clippers, outward bound for Australia to load the wool clip, used to storm along under every stitch of canvas they could safely carry. Today it is deserted except for the fluttering Cape pigeon and the hovering albatross.

But failure was, of course, impossible for Captain Hartnall! He was the only happy man on board, as Mr. Birnie, the third officer, was the only one who was indifferent. The weather was bitterly cold; squall after squall, of hurricane force, and laden with sleet, shrieked out of the north-west, and icy spray lashed the after-deck, even though the vessel was in ballast trim and standing high out of the water. Lurching and pitching wildly, she swept to the eastward, throwing her bows high towards the dark flying scud of the squalls, dipping them till she tossed three-quarters of her rudder out of the sea.

Captain Hartnall was happy because his vessel's progress was even swifter than he imagined it would be when he abandoned the fine weather route farther north and stood down into the wild westerlies. The terrific thrust of the favouring wind and waves more than made up for the power wasted by a propeller, the blades of which beat the air almost as much as they churned the sea. He got considerable pleasure from picturing the astonished face of the captain who was going to overhaul the *Knightley* some-

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where about New Amsterdam, when he arrived at Port Pirie and found her already half loaded.

Mr. Birnie, the third officer, was indifferent because, in spite of his placidity and apparent laziness, he was cast in an iron mould; neither cold, wet, nor discomfort worried him in the least. The other two officers were miserable and disgruntled; they felt that life was being incommensurately aggravated by this entirely unnecessary attempt to save a few days on the passage. The chief officer, a much older man than the captain, felt the cold and discomfort particularly; he could not get warm, even in his bunk, and when keeping his watch on the bridge he was weary of staying on his feet. The deck-hands had reached a state bordering on passive insubordination, and the chief officer, possessed of a fellow-feeling, did little to check them.

If the discomfort on deck was acute, it was worse in the engine-room and stokehold. The engineer on watch had no difficulty about keeping warm; the propeller, with little more solid than air and spray to bite on half the time, would have sent the engines racing so wildly that they must have shaken themselves to pieces but for the unremitting attention to the throttle. Sweat ran in rivulets through the grime on his face, and every limb ached before the four long hours of his watch had passed. In the stokehold the boilers rocked in their saddles with every plunge; coal aimed at an open fire-door rattled against the boiler plates and rebounded; in the bunkers, trimmers were bruised by coal rumbling down on top of them. The chief engineer, stout-hearted in normal times but now feeling for his men, was sullen and resentful—and sufferance, as a rule, is not the badge of the tribe of sea-going engineers. By that time every man on board knew that there was an easier way to Port Pirie farther north.

Just after breakfast one day the hands of the watch below, weary after four hours of buffeting, were about to turn into their bunks for a short spell of uneasy sleep. Mr. Birnie was on the bridge, pacing unsteadily to and fro, occasionally grabbing a rail to steady himself against a lurch, but keeping a keen look-out. That was Mr. Birnie's way, though there was really nothing to look out for; they had not seen a vessel since they left Cape Point and did not expect to see one; Australia was still two thousand miles away. The *Knightley*, her hull sloping upward towards the bows like the roof of a house, climbed to the crest of a huge, foaming roller, wriggled and dropped heavily into the succeeding trough. There followed a violent thud that shook her fore and aft as if she had thumped on a rock. Men and officers, certain that she had struck wreckage, for there were no rocks about in an ocean that was hundreds of fathoms deep, streamed

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out on deck. Captain Hartnall staggered up to the bridge.

"Put her slow!" he shouted from the top of the ladder.

Mr. Birnie rang the telegraph to slow and waited for a reply from the engine-room.

"Get the carpenter along to sound the bilges and peaks," the captain ordered.

Bewildered men were staring aft striving to get a view of the wake when the stern dipped, but no extraneous object appeared on the crests of the rollers running up behind. The more pessimistic suggested low-lying ice which would be difficult to see but stout enough to damage the vessel. The captain turned on the third officer.

"Were you keeping a good look-out?" he demanded.

Mr. Birnie stared him straight in the face and hesitated as if deliberating whether he was keeping a good look-out or not. He was always deliberate and, if possible, his speech was monosyllabic; the "sir" he had to use when answering the captain seemed to come out reluctantly, as an extra effort, and always after a distinct pause.

"Yes . . . sir," he replied at last.

"And you saw no wreckage—nor anything else?"

"No . . . sir."

Even by Captain Hartnall's exacting standard Mr. Birnie was a first class officer and one to be trusted, so there must be another reason for the thud. The chief engineer came up to the bridge with it. He said the young engineer on watch, who was the only person in authority close to the bottom of the ship, considered that the bump was due to the stern plunging into the trough of the sea more violently than usual. The carpenter reported the bilges and peaks dry.

"Put her on full speed again," the captain said.

For the next seven hours the *Knightley* kept on her tortured eastward way, climbing windswept ridges, swooping down into dark, half-sheltered valleys; then, shortly after four o'clock, she again shook fore and aft. The second engineer, who had just relieved the third at the throttle, was startled and badly shaken by a continuous racing of the engines; they jarred and rattled and created a resounding pandemonium in the comparatively restricted space of the engine-room; the maze of glimmering brass and steel—of pistons, connecting rods, and cross-heads—danced and whirled in a frenzy.

The second engineer throttled right down, then signalled to the bridge by ringing the engine-room telegraph to stop. The chief engineer dashed down the iron ladder into the engine-room. The engineers off duty followed. They had an idea that the heavy

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thump of the morning must have fractured the shaft, and made their way into the tunnel. They worked their way aft as far as the stern-gland, but found the shaft intact. The wooden floor was slippery with oil and grease, and they had great difficulty in keeping their feet for the ship, robbed of her steerage-way and under the influence of her high forecastle-head, had brought the wind and sea dead aft and was pitching very heavily.

As it is almost impossible for a tail-shaft to break inside the stern-tube, they came to the conclusion that it had broken just outside—and that, in fact, was what had happened, as Mr. Birnie had just discovered. Getting up from his settee, on which he had been trying to sleep, he had made his way aft, got over the taffrail, leaned out as far as he could over the sea, and looked down. The steamer's stern had just dipped downwards and over to port; it flew up again with a dizzy lift that exposed the greater part of the arched propeller aperture. It was empty; the propeller had gone.

Darkness was coming down. The two red lights which indicated the vessel was not under command were hoisted. Well down by the stern, she continued to lie with the wind and towering seas almost right aft—pitching heavily but lazily. Captain Hartnall retired to his cabin, shut himself in and pondered, while all over the ship, in cabins and in sailors' and firemen's forecastles, officers and men discussed the awful thing that had happened. They discussed it with voices that were almost reduced to whispering, for the prospect was indeed appalling. The accident which had robbed the ship of her mobility had in it a specially heart-rending quality because of her extreme isolation. The shock to the imagination was cruel. To present discomfort had been added an immediate future that was black and an ultimate future that would not bear thinking about.

On the bridge the chief officer, tired of keeping a useless look-out and with no helmsman to supervise, went into the chart-room and pored over the outspread general chart of the South Indian Ocean. The captain had pencilled a neat cross at the estimated position where the propeller was lost, but beyond that there was little on the chart but parallels of latitude and meridians of longitude. Yes, there *was* something else; much nearer than any land was an irregular dotted line marking the extreme northern limit of icebergs.

The chief officer shivered. In that watery abomination of desolation the ship might drift for months without being sighted, unless the drift was suddenly checked by what the irregular dotted line indicated; and if the wind remained in the north-west, that

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would probably be the result of their drifting. If they got that far! Before then they might starve to death! For reasons connected with the Australian customs laws, the captain, a keen businessman, had only taken sufficient provisions in Cape Town to allow for unforeseen delays. Total disablement had certainly not been allowed for, and the chief officer doubted if there was sufficient food on board to give full rations for another fortnight.

Again he shivered. The silence—broken only by the wind that howled outside and the splash of the waves—and the total lack of vibration were depressing in the extreme. Tears came into his eyes. The weird feeling that he had a dead thing under him almost overwhelmed him; and a black resentment against the captain, who, in the first place, had been given command of the vessel over his head and who had now got her into this plight surged up in his heart. The supper bell went, and the third officer came on the bridge to relieve him.

Supper was eaten in silence. The captain sat like a sphinx at the head of the table, and as soon as he had finished his meal he retired to his cabin again. The chief officer and the second—a somewhat colourless individual—would have liked to know what thoughts were working in that self-reliant brain, what pangs of remorse were tugging at the usually unresponsive heart-strings. They were left in ignorance as far as the pangs were concerned, but the thoughts were soon disclosed. At eight o'clock the captain summoned all the officers and engineers to the saloon. The boatswain was sent on the bridge to allow the third officer to attend; the donkeyman relieved the fourth engineer in the silent engine-room. Very soon those assembled discovered that they had not been called to a conference, or a council of war, or even a discussion of ways and means of carrying out a plan. They had come to be told what the captain proposed to do, and to receive instructions—and what the captain proposed to do was to fit the spare propeller and tail-shaft! Blank incredulity showed on every face but one, and the chief engineer voiced it.

"But . . . but you can't do that at sea," he spluttered indignantly.

"*Can't!*" the captain repeated with apparent surprise.

"If you knew the trouble it is to fit a propeller and shaft in a sheltered harbour you wouldn't talk like that. With this sea running it's impossible. To begin with, you would have to tip her down by the head till the stern-tube is out of the water."

"Quite right," the captain answered calmly. "We'll make a start at that tomorrow morning. We'll pump out the after-peak and ballast tanks, and flood No. 1 hold."

"Flood No. 1 *hold!*" the chief officer shouted hysterically. "You'll wreck the ship! You'll lose her! What bulk-heads would

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stand a few hundred tons of water washing against them ? If they do, she'll roll over with us ! "

" We'll have to chance that—unless you can suggest anything else, Mr. Wilkins."

The chief officer did not reply. There was a silent, puzzled pause and a shuffling of feet. Nobody *could* suggest anything else, and all knew it. The chief engineer broke the silence.

" Look here, Captain Hartnall, I'm as keen as you are to try something ; Heaven knows I don't want to end my life down here," he said soberly. " But I tell you it's quite impossible, especially with this sea running. If you would wait for a calm, even."

" Calms are scarce in this latitude and we might wait a month," the captain replied. " By that time we should be so weak with starvation that we could do nothing."

" And you propose to have men working under the counter with a ship jumping like this ! It's murder ! They'll either drown or have their brains bashed out ! I tell you straight, none of *my* men will go over the stern ! "

" They had better wait till they're asked," the captain said drily. " I'm going over the stern myself."

" So am I ! "

The assembled men looked round in astonishment. The speaker was the young third officer who up till then had remained unobtrusively in the background, apparently studying, with an absent mind, the rivets in the beams overhead.

" Thank you, Mr. Birnie," said the captain.

The third officer's prompt offer had a definite, and remedying, effect. It dropped the seeds of doubt, in some cases of shame, into men's minds ; it stirred something in their souls and made an appeal for a more robust attitude towards the crisis that had overtaken them. In a flash it was realized by most of them that resentment, no matter how much it may have been justified, would get them nowhere ; that their present attitude was unworthy of British seamen. They shuffled their feet and looked at each other, trying to read each other's minds, as if they were strikers afraid of being suspected of blacklegging. The captain quickly sensed their hesitation.

" Gentlemen, this is the crux of the matter," he said. " Are we to remain inactive while the ship drifts helplessly towards the icefields, or are we prepared to make an effort to save ourselves ? "

The engineers nodded in apparent agreement, but the chief officer remained obdurate.

" I tell you it's madness to try and flood the for'a'd hold," he moaned.

" That's enough," Captain Hartnall said curtly. " At six o'clock

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tomorrow morning get all your hands on to lifting the ceiling in No. 1 lower hold, and stowing the boards securely in the 'tween-decks. The loose water in the hold *might* damage the bulkhead; if those heavy boards were washing about in it they certainly *would*. Perhaps you didn't think of *that*. Chief, as soon as Mr. Wilkins reports to you that the manhole doors have been taken off No. 1 ballast tank top, open the sea-cocks and get the hold flooded. At the same time start the pumps on the after-peak and tanks."

"Very good, sir," said the chief engineer.

A quarter of an hour later Captain Hartnall went on the bridge, and after some difficulty, for there was no light even in the useless binnacle, found the third officer leaning against the rail behind the canvas dodger, against which sleet was pattering.

"Mr. Birnie, I won't forget this," he said, "but there's something else I want you to do. I've been thinking things out, and have come to the conclusion that we shall require another hand under the counter; we can't manage the job by ourselves. Now, I don't want to *order* any man to do the job because the chief engineer certainly didn't exaggerate when he spoke of the dangers of drowning and bashing. We are in for a hell of a time, and if any man refused to take his share in it, he might well be upheld in a court of law. That would place me, as a shipmaster, in a very awkward position—but I don't want to *plead* with any man. Will you look around, pick out a suitable man, and broach him on the quiet?"

"Yes . . . sir," said Mr. Birnie.

A wild, wintry dawn was ushered in by the chattering of the winch for No. 1 hold. It was being used for sending a derrick aloft. Soon all was ready for flooding the hold. The engineers opened the sea-cocks for the tank, which was already full, and the water overflowed into the hold. The pumping out of the after ballast tanks and after-peak began. The *Knightley* was drifting with half a gale dead aft, and still pitching heavily; the seas running up astern were rising right up to the counter as her stern dipped. It was about noon before the alteration of the trim took effect and she came on to an even keel. Her bow dipped lower in the water, and, no longer holding the wind, came up to windward, bringing the wind and sea abeam so that the steamer lay in the trough and wallowed.

The afternoon watch will long be remembered by every soul on board. The steamer rolled as she had never rolled before, and created a panic. She put a severe strain on the arm and body muscles of men hanging on grimly to keep their footing on the

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decks; the only reason why those of the watch below were not pitched out of their bunks was that they did not attempt to get into them. They were, however, lucky to *be* below, for there they could feel but not see; they missed the swift swoop of masts and funnel that made men dizzy and brought a sinking feeling to the stoutest heart. Even Captain Hartnall, maintaining his position by the bridge rail by intense, painful, muscular effort, became seriously alarmed, for the first time in his career at sea.

From the second the ship's masts and funnel passed the perpendicular, she would lean over somewhat lazily; then, as the great and increasing mass of loose water in the hold washed across, she would fall over with a terrific jerk that almost tore the captain's arms out of their sockets. It was the heavy mass of water that constituted the danger—and absolutely nothing could be done about it; except, perhaps, pump the hold dry again and acknowledge defeat. Even that could not promise immediate relief; and in the meantime, from being almost on her beam-ends on one side, the ship would roll over till she was almost on her beam-ends on the other—and when she was lying over on her side, to men's fevered imagination her masts and funnel seemed to be horizontal.

As she crashed over till the sea lapped over the lee bulwark rail, she squashed the water so that it created a smother of foam half an acre in extent; but it was during those seconds, that passed like hours, when she lay on her side as if she would never recover, that her breathless captain suffered his most acute spasms of anxiety. Always, however, just as hope had almost died, the powerful righting lever created by her low centre of gravity came reluctantly into play, overcame the mass of water that was listing her and brought her upright—only to fall heavily the other way.

Towards four o'clock, when human endurance had almost failed, the rolling eased. The stern rising imperceptibly out of the water was beginning to feel the force of the wind. The *Knightley* came head to wind and sea, and hove herself to. Instead of rolling she pitched, but was comparatively safe. To help to keep her hove-to, two tarpaulins were spread in the main rigging, one on each side, to reinforce the elevated stern which was acting like an after-sail. She was tipped sufficiently soon after dark, when the pumps were stopped and cocks closed.

Next morning the captain ordered the construction of a sea-anchor. Now, the sea-anchor that will hold a five-thousand-ton steamer, in her ordinary trim of being down by the stern, head to the seas in such a gale as was then blowing, has yet to be constructed; but this was different. The vessel was lying head to sea naturally, and the sea-anchor would serve to steady her.

Down in the tunnel the engineers had set to work to uncouple

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and remove the bobbin-piece—a length of shaft in the tunnel recess that connected the main and tail shafts. The broken tail-shaft was withdrawn and the spare one, which had been secured by chains in the tunnel, was run out through the stern-tube till it was level with the stern-post. It was much colder work than engineers usually have to do; for while they were changing the shafts the sea poured in through the stern-tube every time the stern dipped; but, working heroically, they completed the job by midnight. As far as they were concerned all was ready for shipping the spare propeller which was lying in No. 4 'tween-decks. Had the vessel been loaded it would have been lying under tons of cargo, an indication that it was intended for use only after the vessel had been towed, disabled, into a foreign port.

At daybreak next day the chief officer, with his men, descended into the 'tween-decks and very carefully cast adrift the chain lashings securing it. It weighed over five tons, and there was great danger that it might take charge, surge forward along the steeply sloping deck, and maim or kill any man who tried to control it. In the meantime one of the derricks for No. 4 hatch had been rigged up. By means of a heavy chain sling it was landed on the port side of the slippery iron deck, and three more chain slings attached to it. It was ready for being transported aft. From the counter another stout tackle was taken along outside the poop rail, passed in over the bulwarks, and made fast to the chain sling that had just been passed through the boss.

The winch revolved, the propeller was lifted off the deck by means of the derrick and swung out over the heaving sea. It had to be taken aft fully fifty feet. Very carefully the fall of the derrick tackle was checked away, while the tackle from the counter, led to another winch, slowly dragged the propeller aft. More and more the stern tackle took the weight, till eventually the propeller was hanging down from the stern, level with the rudder.

It was then the magnitude of the task they were committed to, and its danger, became fully realized. To get the stern-tube clear of the water the vessel had been tipped till the eight feet mark was awash; but as her stern dipped, the water was rising to the *sixteen* feet mark, and the sea boiled and swirled under her counter. When the stern rose again there was a violent scour through the propeller aperture. The heavy four-bladed propeller, practically out of control, was surging about, now banging against the rudder, now crunching against the plating round the stern-tube. Darkness was almost on them, yet it could not be left to surge about all night. It was hove up close under the counter and made more secure; and, as there was still some daylight left, the captain decided to complete the preliminaries, all ready for the morning. The job

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took a good deal longer than he expected, and showed him clearly how laborious the main business was going to be.

Under the counter were two eye-bolts, one on each side, to which lifting tackles were hooked when taking off the propeller for inspection in dry-dock, and for replacing it. Those were the tackles that would be used for suspending the propeller in its correct plumb position, and Captain Hartnall thought there was just time to get them adjusted. Hooking the upper blocks to the eye-bolts was easy enough; the third officer was lowered over the stern in a boatswain's chair, and though on occasion the water rose as high as his waist, he accomplished the job without much difficulty.

The lower block on the port side was then attached to one of the chain slings that had been passed round opposite blades; but before the starboard one could be hooked on, it, and the threefold purchase rove through it, had to be passed through the propeller aperture from starboard to port. Down went Mr. Birnie, in his boatswain's chair, clinging to the lower block; he was lowered till he gained a footing on the lower plate of the aperture, but the stern dipped and he was washed off it. He regained it with difficulty, and men gasped with horror when the scour through the aperture swung him yards clear. A fathom of ratline line was lowered, and he lashed himself to the rudder-post.

A terrific struggle followed. Every time he got the block close to the stern-post the scour tore it from his grasp. The captain shouted to him to give it up till the morning, but he asked for the end of a heaving line, which he passed through the aperture from port to starboard and made fast to the block. By its means the group of men leaning over the taffrail were able to check the block from surging back, and to haul it upwards after it had been shoved through the aperture. It was slow work, though; for the third officer had to light the six swollen ropes of the tackle round the stern-post against which it was binding. It became so dark that he could hardly be seen from the taffrail, and the captain grew impatient.

"Come up out of that, Mr. Birnie," he shouted. "Leave everything as it is till the morning."

Mr. Birnie either could not, or would not hear.

"He's as full of obstinacy as a mule," the chief officer, who wanted his supper, cried irritably.

"I prefer to call it determination, and I wish you had some of it, Mr. Wilkins," Captain Hartnall snapped.

The boatswain, who had not heard the captain's order, came along with an iron bucket in which there was a lighted fire made of oakum steeped in tar. By its light the work was continued, and the block pulled up to the taffrail and secured. Mr. Birnie, sitting

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in his boatswain's chair, was hauled up on deck and stood shaking himself like a spaniel.

About nine o'clock Captain Hartnall went along to the third officer's cabin. Mr. Birnie had been relieved of watch-keeping, and the captain found him lying in his bunk, propped up with cushions, smoking his pipe and reading a book.

"Any luck, Mr. Birnie?" the captain asked.

"Yes . . . sir."

"Who did you get?"

"Kelly . . . sir," said Mr. Birnie.

With the first streak of dawn, while the hands assembled the gear aft, the captain stood at the break of the spray-swept forecastle-head. He looked along aft, and his vessel reminded him of a pig rooting for truffles, its nose in the ground and its stern cocked up towards the sky. He looked ahead; stretching out to the invisible sea-anchor the wire hawser became bar-tight as the *Knightley's* dripping bows lifted, then slackened and splashed into the water as they dipped. The usual dawn squall howled over the grey waste of foaming ridges, but through the sleet he could see the two red lights dangling mournfully in front of the rust-streaked funnel. Even from where he stood he could hear the heavy wash of water, fore and aft, in No. 1 hold—a dismal, menacing sound. With all his self-confidence he had to admit to considerable anxiety, and he prayed that the bulkheads would stand. He was waiting for the carpenter's report, and when it came it was good. The petty officer had sounded the fore-peak and the bilges of No. 2 hold, and found them dry. The bulkheads were not even leaking. Greatly cheered, the captain prepared for a long day of arduous toil.

Among the others waiting on the poop for him he found Kelly, who prided himself on being the hardest case in the ship—a hard case descended from hard cases, indeed a lineal descendant of the Liverpool Irish packet rats who manned the notorious Western Ocean packet ships in the middle of last century. Unlike his officers, who were going over the stern with him wearing sea-boots, oilskins well lashed at the wrists and below the knees, and with small towels tucked under the collars of their coats, Kelly was barefooted and clad only in singlet and dungaree trousers. Erect and jaunty, as if he were going for a stroll along the beach at Southport on a summer day, he stood among his blue-lipped, shivering mates whose bodies were bent to the blast; for on that high exposed afterdeck there was little shelter.

"Going for a bathe this morning, Kelly?" Captain Hartnall asked pleasantly.

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"I am, sir; and I hope the maid hasn't forgotten to turn on the hot-water tap," Kelly answered with a grin.

From the counter the propeller was lowered by the stern tackle till the port lifting tackle took its weight. The other tackle was then unhooked, and the sling removed by the third officer who had already gone over the stern. The propeller was lowered still farther and the starboard lifting tackle hove on, to drag it into the aperture. The captain and Kelly got into their boatswain's chairs and were slacked down, with life-lines round them, to the eight feet mark. After Mr. Birnie's experience of the previous evening they secured themselves to the rudder-post at once. The water was icy cold, and they gasped and choked as it closed over them; from their lower level the foaming crests of the waves seemed to tower to an enormous height.

"Ah, well, we're nice and sheltered down here, sir," Kelly said.

Under the lee of the counter they were certainly sheltered from the wind, the swirling spray, and the driving snow which swept past the vessel's sides in two streams and united again in the wake a few yards behind them. If only the sea were not so infernally cold, the captain thought ruefully as he fingered the heavy hammer slung round his neck. With it he had arranged to make signals by taps on the steel-plating to the engineers in the tunnel, but he did not have occasion to use it that day. Three whole hours elapsed before any of the men were able to lay a hand on the propeller which was grinding and crunching against the stern-post.

At first they found the conditions almost terrifying, and all they could do was to hang on grimly and wipe the salt water from their eyes as their heads emerged from the sea. The terrific scour through the propeller aperture seemed as if it would choke the very life out of them. A less determined man than Captain Hartnall would have given up the job there and then; men with less powers of endurance than Mr. Birnie and Kelly possessed could not have stood it.

It was late in the day before they could get on with the job of coaxing the propeller to lie fairly in the middle of the aperture. Shouted orders were cut short on the captain's lips, but by signalling to those who were leaning out over the quarter it was possible to convey instructions to heave, or slack, on the tackles. The adjustment became delicate. As the propeller was gradually worked into position, the heaving and slacking got down to a matter of inches. Thrice they got the hole through the boss of the propeller to coincide with the outer flange of the stern-tube, but were unable to stop the winch at the exact moment. Darkness put a stop to the work, and the men had to be hauled up on to the poop—soaked, deafened, and exhausted—with the boss and the stern-tube still out of alignment.

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The following daybreak brought no change in the weather. Again the suffering seamen mustered on the bleak, windswept poop, appropriately christened by one of them Mount Misery. The three men were lowered into the water and secured to the rudder-post. By noon the five-ton propeller was hanging at the correct height and rubbing against the stern-post, but six inches over to starboard. Mr. Birnie and Kelly got over to that side and endeavoured to lever it into position. Their combined efforts, coinciding with a lucky surge of the starboard tackle, got it into the exact position. The captain yelled frantically to the watchers to hold on to everything, and hammered his signal to the waiting engineers. The sea closed over him and his companions. His head was the first to emerge from the foam.

"Is it still in its place, Kelly?" he spluttered.

"Faith, sir, it's mighty contagious!" Kelly yelled.

Again the captain hammered on the plating. For moments big as days, as it seemed—at any rate for twenty minutes which passed like hours—the three men watched, and then the thimble point of the tail-shaft making its way through the round aperture in the boss of the propeller appeared. Never did the most anxious of terriers watch a rat-hole more keenly than those men watched that aperture.

"It's coming, Birnie; by Heaven! it's coming!" Captain Hartnall cried in triumph.

"Yes . . . sir," said Mr. Birnie.

Inch by inch the tail-shaft moved outwards till six inches of it projected abaft the propeller boss; then the first thread of the worming, on which the nut to secure the propeller would be screwed, came into view. It would take the engineers some time to put the bobbin-piece in its place and get it connected to the tail-shaft and main-shaft; so, after the propeller had been bound hard against the stern-post by ropes leading from the quarter pipes, the three men in the water were hauled up for a welcome meal. Less than an hour of daylight remained when the chief engineer reported the job complete, and Captain Hartnall decided to wait till next morning before tackling the job of screwing on the propeller nut. At twilight, with a good horizon, the second officer's stellar observations showed that the *Knightley* had drifted two hundred miles to the south-east since she broke down.

Dawn found the little group of watchers mustered on the poop for what they hoped would be the last time; and shortly after that the dauntless three were secured to the rudder-post, waiting for the nut to be lowered to them. It weighed three hundred pounds and had to be slung carefully; for if it had slipped out of the sling and dropped into the sea all the work they had

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accomplished would have been nothing but wasted effort. There was not another nut on board and the slinging of it had given the captain food for much anxious thought, till an ingenious engineer came to the rescue by fitting two tap-bolts to it.

Even a three hundred-pound nut takes a lot of handling under the conditions in which the men over the stern worked, and it required their united strength to get it over the thimble point of the shaft and pushed home. With the sling still attached to it they managed to get a round turn of the thread of the nut on to the worm of the shaft; then they reckoned it was safe, and the sling was dispensed with. They got three more turns by hand before the key for tightening the nut was lowered to them.

The key weighed three hundredweight, and had slats on the rim which fitted projections on the nut. At the end of the handle was a round hole into which the lower block of a tackle from under the counter could be hooked. At first the key could be turned by those above hauling on the tackle by hand, a quarter of a turn of the nut at a time; but to the men in the water fell the almost herculean task of shifting the position of the key on the nut, ready for another quarter of a turn. To save it from dropping into the sea it was suspended by a line from the port quarter, with a smaller line attached to the rudder-post to enable the men down there to haul it towards them when it swung outwards. The sea was running as high as ever; the steamer's stern rose and fell continuously. Up it flew till it brought the nut clear of the water and gave them a brief spell in which to work; down it plunged, and they held on for their lives in the seething vortex.

At times it took them half an hour to shift the grip of the key on the nut. The hours passed; the short spell of winter daylight was drawing to a close, but the soaked, exhausted, yet indomitable men worked on, determined to get the job finished. For the last few turns of the nut the fall of the tackle had to be taken to one of the steam winches. The strain on the tackle became so great that the nut must have been nearly home, but it had to be got into a position where the hole bored through it, for the locking pin coincided with the hole in the tail-shaft through which the pin had to pass.

Darkness again overtook them, and once more light was obtained from flares made by burning oakum and tar in buckets. The nut was now turning an eighth of an inch at a time. With the strain on the tackle the moisture was being squeezed out of the rope fall, which on occasion surged back round the winch and was torn out of the frozen hands of the man who was holding on to it down on the main-deck. Captain Hartnall was sitting astride the propeller boss, probing the hole in the nut with the pin held in fingers numb and blue with cold. To avoid losing the pin it was

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attached to his wrist by a length of spun-yarn. He was almost in despair, when he felt the pin entering the hole in the shaft. He drove it home with his hammer, and the completely exhausted men were hauled up on to the poop. When they reached it they could not stand on their feet.

Later in the evening the captain told the steward to take Kelly along to the saloon and give him a good stiff dram of rum. He then did a thing he had never done since he first took command of a ship. He invited an officer—Mr. Birnie—to his cabin for a whisky and soda. The whisky and soda was followed by others, and by the time Mr. Birnie said good night he was almost discursive.

Only Mr. Birnie and Kelly went over the stern next morning, and two hours' work sufficed to cover the job of securing the pin and removing the tackles and slings from the propeller. The two men were hauled up to the taffrail for the last time. The captain gave instructions to fill the after-peak and ballast tanks, and at the same time ordered a full head of steam. Gradually the steamer's stern dropped and she came on to a more even keel, but there was still the flooded hold to be pumped out. Without a doubt as her bow rose she would fall off into the trough of the sea, in spite of the pull of the sea-anchor and the tarpaulins in the main rigging, and they might lose her yet through the mass of loose water in the half-empty hold. The memory of that awful rolling was terrifying; she must be kept head on to the seas till the hold was pumped out; the engine-room telegraph on the bridge was rung to "stand-by."

It was not answered at once; the engines had to be turned over both ways. Both on deck and in the engine-room there was now considerable anxiety, heart-burning, and searching of mind. Had there been any flaw in the work carried out in the tunnel, or under the counter? Had anything been left undone? Should the first movement of the engines have as a result a crunching jar that would wreck the efforts of the past week and leave them to drift and starve? Only the actual working of the engines could tell. From the bridge Captain Hartnall listened intently. He heard the first wheezings of steam; were the engines vibrating again? They were and, unknown to him, spray was being tossed up under the counter. The telegraph from the engine-room clanged its reply; the engines were ready.

The sea-anchor was tripped by a line that had been attached to the crown of the kedge, and hoisted on board. The engines were put ahead at half-speed; the *Knightley* was steering again. The captain did not want to drive her too hard into the pounding seas, nor did he wish to steam far back to the westward and lose

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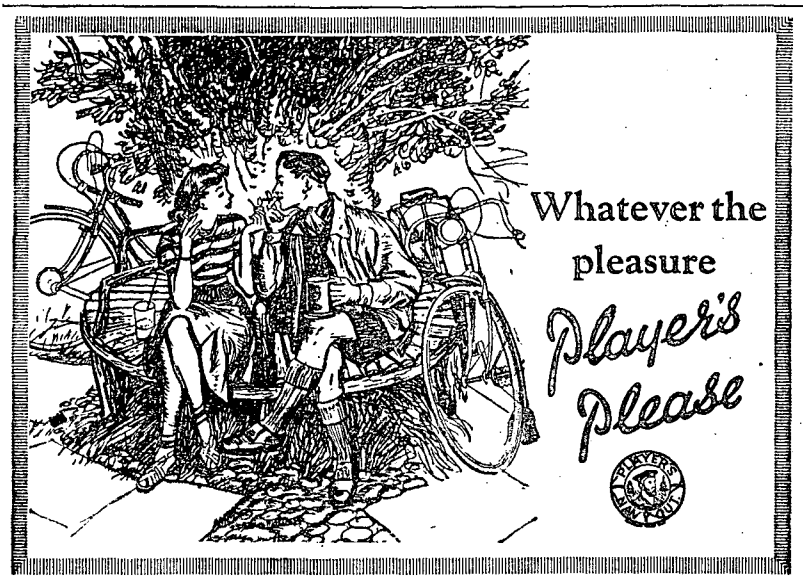

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valuable time. But she had to be kept head to sea at all costs. For most of the time half-speed sufficed; but frequently a touch of full speed was required to give her more steerage-way and straighten her up when she fell off to a dangerous angle and gave a hint that she was about to resume her rolling. The captain's hand was continually on the telegraph handle. At last the flooded hold was pumped out down to the bilges; the manhole doors on top of the ballast tanks were replaced and secured. The chief officer came on the bridge to report, and the captain banged the telegraph handle down to full speed with an air of finality.

"Course . . . sir?" the third officer enquired.

"Keep her north-east, Mr. Birnie; you and I and Kelly are due for a spell of warm weather," the captain answered with a partially concealed grin.

The *Knightley* arrived at Port Pirie only a few days overdue. So well had the work been done that she steamed from that port to the United Kingdom, thence to Singapore and back, before the propeller was attended to in the ordinary way at the regular dry-docking. The rival steamer from Cape Town had got to Port Pirie before him; but, later, Captain Hartnall had his compensations. From his owners he received a gold watch, suitably inscribed; and he and his fellow-workers under the counter were awarded Lloyd's medal for meritorious service. That decoration is bestowed irrespective of rank and nationality, but it is not lightly awarded. It is recognized by seafarers all over the world as a great honour, and none ever earned it more worthily than those men who were lashed to the *Knightley's* rudder-post. Captain Hartnall had his placed in a frame and displayed in a prominent place in his cabin; Mr. Birnie sent his to his mother and thought little more about it; what happened to Kelly's is unknown; for—true vagabond of the sea that he was—he left the steamer at her home port and no one connected with her ever heard of him again.

* * *

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 160

Across. 5, Author. 8, Get a move on. 9, Canute. 10, Bridle path. 11, Orison. 12, Best seller. 17, Eel. 18, Slain. 20, Golf. 22, Tern. 23, Topee. 24, Sat. 26, Degenerate. 30, Remote. 31, Fallacious. 32, Morale. 33, Anticlimax. 34, Select.

Down. 1, Hearse. 2, Bandit. 3, Cohere. 4, Tenable. 5, Anchor. 6, Tangible. 7, Out to win. 13, Shop. 14, Safe. 15, Lease. 16, Elite. 18, Stye. 19, Aria. 20, Gone home. 21, Lemonade. 25, Agility. 26, Defeat. 27, Nuance. 28, Raisin. 29, Toucan.

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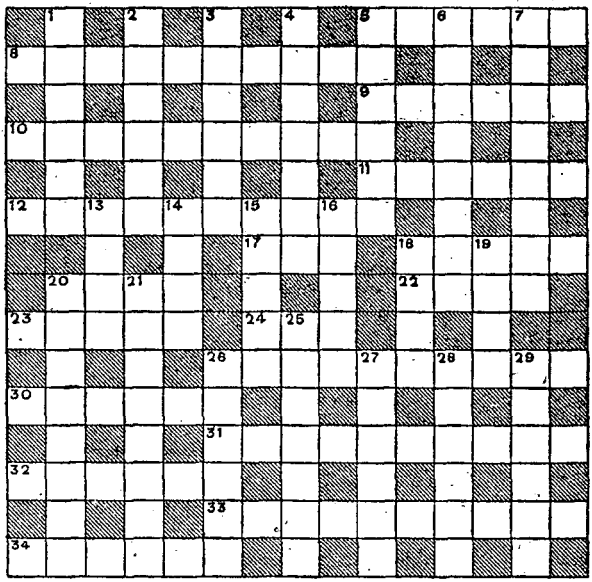
ARGOSY CROSS WORD

Solution on page 159



CLUES

Across

5 The originator of many a plot (6).
8 Inducement to make haste (3, 1, 4, 2).
9 This king, who withstood the rolling breakers, is shrewd about an article (6).
10 Sounds like the road to the altar ? (6, 4).
11 A constellation takes to its midst the nineteenth letter and becomes a prayer (6).
12 What 5 across hopes his next will be (4, 6).
17 "Index learning turns no student pale, Yet holds the — of science by the tail" (*Pope*) (3).
18 Often the occupant of 1 down (5).
20 Game that is played round the clock perhaps (4).
22 This sea bird only sounds as if it might tack into the wind (4).
23 Removal of this in the tropics might be a greeting (5).
24 In after this would make a very glossy finish (3).
26 Headless, one sunk so low might produce heat and power (10).
30 Very distant meteor (6).
31 These lead you up the garden path (10).
32 When the masculine contains the alternative the result should be high in combat (6).
33 How a taxi in calm may fall flat after the rush hour ! (10).
34 Choice mixture of celestial beginning (6).

Down

1 Vehicle that might have been used in Journey's End (6).
2 This bad tin is an all-round rogue (6).
3 The little company present cling together (6).
4 Doesn't necessarily mean you can hold on to your flat (7).
5 "The — is deep : will that humour pass" (*Merry Wives of Windsor*) (6).
6 Not elusive, but beginning with a pungent flavour (8).
7 Attitude of a contestant —but sounds as if he has got to lose first ! (3, 2, 3).
13 Is this where we buy posh hops ? (4).
14 A house for the petty cash ? (4).
15 Fifty off duty ? (5).
16 The cream of 34 across (5).
18 What an eyesore ! (4).
19 This might be composed in any sort of variation (4).
20 Returned to the fold (4, 4).
21 Citrous assistance in liquid form (8).
25 Necessary to "That daring young man on the flying trapeze" (7).
26 A famous Scots spider taught a hero not to accept this (6).
27 Delicate difference in the meaning of an Ainu ancestor (6).
28 The artillery is in for a plum pudding ingredient ! (6).
29 The buyer of this livestock certainly gets a big bill ! (6).

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